

Guyana Public Service Union

Message on the Occasion of Fathers' Day 2023 from Ms Dawn Gardener, 1st Vice President.

On behalf of the Guyana Public Service Union, Fathers' Day Greetings are extended to all fathers nationally and internationally. History tells us that Fathers' day was founded in Spokane, Washington at the YMCA in 1910 by Sonora Smart Dodd, who was born in Arkansas. In 1909, Sonora, the mother of Fathers' Day, was listening to a Mothers' Day sermon when she realised the need for a day to celebrate fathers, especially her own Father, a Civil War veteran, William Jackson Smart, who was a single-parent raising six children.

In 1972, some 58 years after United States President Woodrow Wilson declared a Special Holiday for mothers, a day was given to honour the contributions of fathers. The third Sunday in the month of June each year is recognised internationally as the day we celebrate fathers.

Fathers are the silent heroes and bedrock of the family. In today's society, a father may be biological, spiritual or connected to their family by virtue of affinity. The social and moral construct of "father by affinity" is ever more present in today's society by virtue of adoption, foster parenting, or the re-organisation or re-constitution of a family.

Notwithstanding the degree of affinity or consanguinity, the presence of fathers in the homes and institutions of society is a vital aspect of growth and development of the members therein. In 1919, when Guyana was a British Colony, the father of trade unionism in Guyana, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow laid the early foundation for the just and equitable treatment of the working class people of Guyana.

This reminds us that fatherhood is not merely a badge to brandish, but a continuing responsibility in moulding our children and those within local institutions to be part of building a stronger, more united and prosperous Guyana. The Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) recognises that post-Covid-19 pandemic, many fathers were left on the breadline with little or no incentive from the government to support their families economically. It remains challenging for fathers to face the rising cost of living and properly provide for their families and while being low wage earners.

The vulnerability of fathers in Guyana to provide a decent life for their children is compounded by the global economic environment impacted severely by Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine, rising fuel prices at gas stations across Guyana, while climate change continues to disrupt and displace households allocated along the fragile low coastal zone of Guyana.

The prohibitively high cost of house lots, high rates of interest on mortgages, inadequate flood insurance and a colonial tax code that overtaxes public servants are primary causes of social inequality in Guyana. Too many fathers across the public service are silently facing this grim reality. Equally, a greater number of fathers and their families are driven daily into deeper poverty.

The GPSU advocates that the government put in place mechanisms necessary to enhance opportunities and growth of micro enterprises among the working class people. With committed efforts on the part of the government, fathers in the public service can provide their families with a decent life by 2025.

The GPSU continues to advocate for tax justice for all public servants with respect to the work they do for the betterment of this country. The reality is that the majority of public servants are

taxed by the government with respect to the food and clothing they utilise during the performance of the government's work. Similarly, the equal rates of taxation on PAYE, applicable to public servants as it is to those working in the private sector which enjoys huge tax breaks is inequitable and unjust. Therefore, the lowering of the rates of taxation for all public servants will mean more disposable income in the pockets of fathers and will be the first step towards realising a decent standard of living.

The GPSU urges all fathers to continue to be diligent in pursuit of what is perceived as best for your families and country. With a projected USD\$1.63 billion to be earned by Guyana at the end of this year from the oil and gas industry (Reuters, January 16, 2023), these aspirations are attainable. However, fathers across the public service must remember on this special day to always be mindful of obstructions, to do your duty to your family and country; and to keep your hands upon the throttle, and your eyes upon the rail. Our best days as a people in solidarity, are yet ahead.

Happy Fathers' Day 2023.