



AMERINDIAN PEOPLES ASSOCIATION
200 Charlotte Street, Bourda, Georgetown, Guyana
Tel: (592) 227-0275; Tel/Fax: (592) 223-8150
E-mail: apaguy@networksgy.com

May 25, 2012

Press Statement

APA Executive Meeting Discusses Tshaos Elections, Budget Cuts and Other Issues

The Executive Committee of the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) concluded its first statutory meeting for 2012 during May 7-11 and held discussions on a number of issues and concerns. Among these were attacks on and misrepresentation of the work of the APA, the conduct of the recently held Tshaos elections and the kind of information that is being given to indigenous communities regarding the national budget cuts.

With regards to the misrepresentation of the work of the APA, based on reports from APA representatives and supporters in communities, the organisation was being constantly maligned and blamed by government representatives during their recent outreach to Amerindian communities for the budget cuts and its future negative impacts on Amerindians. Not only was this being done by government representatives but also by other individuals who ordinarily claim to represent indigenous peoples though it was not clear on this occasion who or what office they were representing. Additionally, the organisation was linked with one opposition political party or the other as it suited whoever was speaking at the time. The APA wishes to clarify that it had no inputs on budgetary allocations or cuts, is a non-governmental organisation who seeks to outreach to all who interact with or have an interest in indigenous peoples' development and upliftment but is not politically aligned.

The Committee wishes to remind that the APA has made its position on the Guyana's LCDS very clear in various documents submitted to the government and others, this being that in principle we believe that potentially the LCDS can offer great benefits to Guyana and to indigenous communities but that there are certain rights issues that needs to be addressed. The government has agreed in its negotiations with the Norwegians that it will follow certain guidelines and ensure that certain safeguards are followed and it is these that the APA is urging the government to abide by. To date we are aware that not all of these have been observed. The APA is also urging the government to follow relevant internationally accepted standards and safeguards especially those that the state has agreed it will abide by.

The APA is urging persons who identify themselves as representatives of indigenous peoples to work towards the improvement of the conditions of our people and not to be engaged in

spreading fear and mistrust within the communities. It is worthy to note that persons on the recent visits to the communities have been telling our people that there are no monies for development but still find the funds to travel to different villages to tell them so. The Committee would also like to remind the head of the National Toshias Council and the Head of the Indigenous Peoples Commission that they hold key positions in representing the indigenous peoples of this country and this must not be confused with political party representation.

In relation to the recently held nationwide Toshias and village councils elections, the Committee notes with concern the various anomalies and discrepancies in the conduct of these elections. Reports received by the APA reveal no uniformity of a process in the conduct of elections, no uniformity in the eligibility criteria for persons running for office, and the promotion of and campaigning on behalf of a particular candidate or candidates by the Minister of Amerindian Affairs and regional officers, among others.

In Aishalton in Region 9, persons were told that if they were nominated as Toshias, they could not be nominated for another position on the council. The Amerindian Act is not clear about this. In Parishara in the same region, a candidate was deemed ineligible to run because of alleged past wrongdoing yet obvious irregularities have been overlooked again and again during the tenure of various leaders. In other cases the returning officers conducting elections used their own interpretations of the Act and conducted elections by these interpretations. In Wakapoa in Region 2, the returning officer started counting the ballots ½ hour before the scheduled time and these ballots were not separated according to nominees as stipulated by the Act. In Paramakatoi, Region 8, due to confusion of dates and information by the CDO, only under one third of the eligible voters were able to vote. In some villages in Regions 1 and 2, Regional officials were openly campaigning for candidates who are also party supporters. In some communities, irrespective of distance, members were told they had no choice but to vote at one polling place while it is clear that there was the choice of having several polling places in a large village as happened in Santa Rosa.

The Committee is of the opinion that Toshias and village council elections should be carried out free of interference and manipulation by any political party since elected leaders are there to represent the people who have varying concerns. Likewise, returning officers and regional officials should not impose their own opinions on the elections process. Such a process should have some amount of uniformity making allowances for geography and other peculiarities.

As part of its meeting the Executive Committee asked for and was granted meetings with a number of missions, agencies, commissions and political parties, among others. These include the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Indigenous Peoples Commission, the Roman Catholic Bishop Francis Alleyne, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, Ambassador Lindsay Jones of the European Union, Canadian High Commissioner David Devine, British High Commissioner Mr. Andrew Ayre, the US Ambassador Mr. D. Brent Hardt, A Partnership for National Unity, and the Alliance for Change. Unfortunately the Committee could not secure meetings with the Minister of Amerindian Affairs since the APA was told that she would be out of the country and likewise the National Toshias Council whose head was also going to be out of the country. The APA could also not secure a meeting

with the GGMC Commissioner. In an effort to meet with the Peoples Progressive Party and the Office of Climate Change, the APA was directed to the Office of the President but the President was not available at the time. However President Ramotar did say that his office would contact the APA to set a meeting at a mutually convenient date and a meeting has since been held between President Ramotar and the APA President Sharon Atkinson and Programme Administrator, Jean La Rose.

The round of meetings was very informative and confirmed that the APA's representation cuts across different geographical locations in Guyana. It was also a forum for the APA to highlight its work with indigenous communities and to hear directly from those engaged in discussions on indigenous related issues to highlight their positions in this regard. The APA's Executive Committee Meeting is held twice yearly.