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Guyana: Criminal violence and police response; state protection efforts (2004-2005)

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Various sources of 2005 indicated that crime was a source of concern in urban areas, especially in the capital city of Georgetown and in New Amsterdam, and in towns along the East Coast Demerara region such as Buxton (Canada 10 Dec. 2005; US 31 May 2005; CMC 30 Aug. 2005; *ibid.* 4 Mar. 2005). Commonly reported crimes include armed robberies, carjackings, kidnappings and residential break-ins (US 31 May 2005; Canada 10 Dec. 2005). Depending on the source and the nature of the crime reported upon, whether violent, serious, or petty, the number of cases recorded in 2004 varies from 3,448 (CMC 24 Feb. 2005) and 4,661 (Guyana 3 Mar. 2005). In the case of violent crime, specifically murder, kidnapping, violent and aggravated robbery, incidents rose from 2,477 in 2003 to 4,261 in 2004, while serious crimes other than those itemized increased two per cent from totals registered in 2003 (CMC 4 Mar. 2005). Compared to 2004, crime data for the 2005 year, up to 20 November, showed that armed robbery had increased by fifty per cent, while rape had decreased by ten per cent, there were eight fewer murders reported and, overall serious criminal offences decreased by eight per cent (*Stabroek News* 27 Nov. 2005).

The narcotics trade (*International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005* Mar. 2005; *Kaieteur News* 4 Jan. 2005), the influx of firearms (Caribbean Net News 19 Aug. 2005; *Stabroek News* 27 Nov. 2005) and the return of criminal deportees from their host countries (CMC 4 Mar. 2005; *ibid.* 11 Sept. 2005) are apparently some of the factors contributing to crime, especially violent crime. In addition, various sources have mentioned that continued political divisiveness between the two main rival parties has exacerbated criminal activity and fuelled racial polarization (Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005; CMC 5 Oct. 2005; *ibid.* 6 Oct. 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). In particular, the opposition PNC/R party alleges that the ruling PPP/C government, especially law enforcement, is "infiltrated" by organized crime (CMC 6 Oct. 2005), while the PPP/C counter this accusation with the claim that the PNC/R is linked to criminal gangs (*ibid.* 5 Oct. 2005). Please consult GUY42624.E of 3 May 2004 for background information about the ongoing accusations between these two political parties.

Police response and effectiveness

The country's police force is reportedly hampered by chronic understaffing and by a lack of resources and training, all of which have contributed to

inadequate law enforcement practice and response (UN May 2005; US 31 May 2005; *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005* Mar. 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec 1.d.). Pertaining to the drug trade, the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005* noted that the government's efforts on that front have been weakened by allegations of police corruption, lack of cooperation among various law enforcement agencies and insufficient funding (Mar. 2005). According to the United Nations, police officers receive meagre salaries and have limited access to equipment and technology (May 2005, 44). In addition, the force is reportedly understaffed by 30 per cent and is housed in inadequate facilities (UN May 2005, 44).

Furthermore, human rights reports continue to call attention to alleged incidents police of misconduct, including the use of lethal force during law enforcement operations (AI 2005; Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1). Amnesty International (AI) reported that the police were responsible for at least 29 shooting deaths in 2004, "some of which were alleged extrajudicial executions" (2005). While statistics for 2005 on the number of individuals slain during police operations could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, *Country Reports 2004* noted that the new police commissioner did take steps to investigate and prosecute officers involved in such unlawful behaviour as the use of excessive force in apprehending suspected criminals (28 Feb. 2005, Sec.1). Nevertheless, AI noted that of the officers indicted in 2004 for alleged involvement in extrajudicial executions, "none was convicted" (2005). In a 19 January 2006 telephone interview, a representative of the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) noted that, in December 2005 one police officer was convicted and sent to prison for his involvement in an extrajudicial killing; however, two other officers were cleared of charges.

With regard to redress against abusive police behaviour, individuals can report allegations of misconduct to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1; Guyana 3 Mar. 2005). In 2003, the PCA reportedly received 214 complaints, of which 168 were investigated; in 2004, of the 235 complaints made, 43 inquiries followed (*ibid.*). While information on the outcomes of these investigations could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, *Country Reports 2004* noted that the PCA's effectiveness is restricted by its limited investigative power (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1). In November 2005, *Kaiteur News* reported that when PCA Chairman Cecil Kennard visited the Essequibo Coast, residents came forth to make more than 200 various complaints against the police, including those of brutality, bribery and harassment (6 Nov. 2005). Moreover, the GHRA representative noted that because of the new police commissioner's efforts to raise police standards, there has been a "marked improvement" by authorities in addressing police misconduct (19 Jan. 2006).

Other factors influencing police effectiveness include such issues as the populace's trust in the police (GHRA 19 Jan. 2006; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1; *Kaiteur News* 4 Jan. 2005), racial polarization by officers (Freedom House 11 Aug. 2005; UN May 2005, 43), and general unprofessional conduct (UN May 2005; see also *Kaiteur News* 6 Nov. 2005). In a 19 January 2006 telephone interview, a representative of the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) stated that the "prevailing attitude" of the public towards the police is one of little confidence and some mistrust, owing to law enforcement's poor record in apprehending suspected criminals in the face of a relatively high crime rate. According to *Country Reports 2004*, "public confidence and cooperation with the police remained extremely low" (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 1).

Moreover, the proposed reforms of the Disciplined Forces Commission (DFC) originally set up in 2003 to, among other things, look for ways to improve police practice, have reportedly been stalled in Parliament (*Kaiteur News* 4 Jan. 2005; see also GHRA 19 Jan. 2006), and according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) "will remain slow and patchy, particularly where there are demands on human and financial resources" (May 2005). As of January 2006, the GHRA representative noted that despite the Parliamentary committee created to examine DFC recommendations not having convened since it was formed 18 months ago, the new police commissioner has decided to move forward on some DFC recommendations, especially those concerning professionalizing such law enforcement practices as intake procedures and such technical services as forensics (19 Jan. 2006).

With regard to racial polarization, Freedom House noted that law enforcement has been "seriously eroded" by allegations of racial bias: a number of Indo-Guyanese claim that the mainly Afro-Guyanese police ignores them, while many Afro-Guyanese maintain "that the police are manipulated by the government for its own purposes" (11 Aug. 2005; see also UN May 2005, 43).

Finally, in a May 2005 country assessment, the UN pointed out that citizens reportedly felt that police officers generally ignored their rights and seemingly are "unable or unwilling to bring perpetrators to justice if they are rich or influential" (May 2005, 43).

State efforts

In February 2005, the government released its 2005 budget, of which about 3.4 billion Guyanese dollars (US\$17 million) were to be allocated to improving public security operations (CMC 24 Feb. 2005). Plans for such included improving intelligence gathering capacity and forensic expertise, renovating police stations, recruiting and training new police personnel, and acquiring equipment and vehicles (*ibid.*).

The government introduced a number of anti-crime initiatives in 2005 which, along with increased budgeting commitment, included the introduction of a national anti-crime plan (*Guyana Chronicle* 22 June 2005; *Guyana* 31 Oct. 2005) and crime prevention programs (CMC 30 Aug. 2005; *ibid.* 26 Nov. 2005; *Caribbean Net News* 21 Nov. 2005), and the use of police/army joint security forces to pursue alleged criminals (*Caribbean Net News* 28 Oct. 2005; *Global Insight* 26 Oct. 2005).

In June 2005, President Bharrat Jagdeo presented the Drug Strategy Master Plan, a five-year public security plan to address the country's crime situation (*Guyana Chronicle* 22 June 2005; *Guyana* 31 Oct. 2005). As of October 2005, a number of actions outlined in the plan had been initiated: increased police visibility; the creation of community-based policing units (*ibid.*; CMC 11 Sept. 2005) and neighbourhood police (*Guyana* 31 Oct. 2005); better efforts to control illegal guns (*ibid.*; *Caribbean Net News* 19 Aug. 2005). Further government efforts to strengthen law enforcement activities saw the renovation and building of police stations across the country, the purchase of new vehicles, and an assortment of training programs for officers (*Guyana* 31 Oct. 2005). However, in October 2005, President Jagdeo expressed his dissatisfaction with the police's response to the violent crime caused by "heavily armed gangs roaming the volatile east-coast corridor" of the country, stating that the police needed to be "more aggressive" in its approach (CMC 5 Oct. 2005).

In August 2005, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), as part of the Drug Strategy Master Plan's crime prevention commitment, unveiled new duty and tax concessions for those businesses wanting to buy crime prevention technology such as electronic surveillance equipment (CMC 30 Aug. 2005). In November 2005, the government introduced its National Commission on Law and Order, an advisory body whose aim is to boost the country's "crime-fighting, information-gathering and surveillance capacities" (ibid. 26 Nov. 2005). The 26-member commission is reportedly inclusive, for among its members are representatives from religious, political, social, and private sector organizations (ibid.).

Also in November 2005, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) announced that it would be providing financial backing in the amount of US\$1 million to the country's Citizen Security Intervention Programme (CMC 21 Nov. 2005; Caribbean Net News 21 Nov. 2005). Fundamentally, the program's aim is the strengthening of the police force's ability to "monitor trends in crime and violence, facilitate information exchange, plan strategically and coordinate initiatives by other institutions and ministries involved in crime prevention activities" (ibid.). Moreover, the IADB will also provide a US\$10 million "soft loan" to Guyana to finance a community-based intervention program to address the "root causes of crime and violence in the country's six municipalities" (CMC 21 Nov. 2005).

Concerning joint security patrols in high crime areas, in October 2005, about 400 army and police troops were deployed in the village of Buxton, reportedly a "safe haven for criminals," (Caribbean Net News 28 Oct. 2005) located in the East Coast Demerara region (ibid.; Global Insight 26 Oct. 2005). Varying reports of the incident, called "Operation Stiletto," allege the joint patrol searched either 150 (Caribbean Net News 28 Oct. 2005) or 344 (Global Insight 26 Oct. 2005) houses and either arrested 112 (ibid.) or detained 140 (Caribbean Net News 28 Oct. 2005) individuals. While the authorities justified this operation as a watchdog effort to monitor criminals suspected of using Buxton to hide from the police, fingerprinting and photographing detainees, the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) condemned the action as an "ill-prepared operational and human rights nightmare, with likely social and political repercussions the exact opposite of what is required" (Caribbean Net News 28 Oct. 2005).

Witness protection

While information about witness protection programs in Guyana was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, in November 2005, Commissioner of police Winston Felix stated that the ability of law enforcement to provide witness protection was "very limited" (*Stabroek News* 27 Nov. 2005). He further noted that lack of funding and geographical considerations were barriers to an effective protection program (ibid.). In 2004, Amnesty International spotlighted the murder of a high-profile informant two days before he was to provide testimony in court to press upon Guyanese authorities the need to set up a "comprehensive protection scheme" extending not only to witnesses but to lawyers, police officers and human rights defenders as well (25 June 2004). Moreover, AI recommended that members of the Guyana Police Force and the Ministry of National Security be excluded from future witness protection efforts due to their alleged involvement in the killing of the above-mentioned informant (AI 25 June 2004).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time

constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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A professor specializing in public security issues in Guyana could not provide the requested information within time constraints.

Internet sites, including: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Factiva, Human Rights Watch, Justice Studies Centre of the Americas (JSCA), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World News Connection (WNC).

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