

Not for sale

Trafficking in persons in Guyana



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Co-operative Republic of Guyana

Original title: Not for sale. Trafficking in persons in Guyana.

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Publisher: Office of the Leader of the Opposition

Cover: The cover shows a 'Kaimoo' sex camp in the Cuyuni-Mazaruni Region. Photograph by Guyana Women Miners' Organisation.

Production Services: Printed in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

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Denial

The People's Progressive Party Civic administration's Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Pauline Sukhai, stated in January 2013: *"Last year we would not have had any reports of trafficking in persons that the Ministry recorded..."*

Sukhai's denial of the crime of trafficking in persons was characteristic of the 'syndrome of denial' by administration spokespersons and the state media.

Bibi Shadick, in her day as Minister of Human Services, had once declared that there was "no real evidence of Trafficking in Persons in Guyana." She did concede that there might be instances of "voluntary involvement in illicit activities," but insisted that "there is no evidence of a trade, really."

Priya Manickchand, during her controversial tenure as Minister of Human Services, tried to prove that the problem of people trafficking was less severe than it really was. She reacted notoriously and vociferously to Guyana's being placed on the Tier 2 Watch List of the US government's annual report on trafficking in persons in June 2010.

Manickchand told a press conference, less than two hours after the Report was released by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, that the report was based on "sheer ignorance and eye-pass" and, legitimately, could be considered as "crap."

Jennifer Webster, the current Minister of Human Services, seems to have adopted the 'Shadick doctrine of denial'. She attempted to downplay the virulence of 'trafficking' by suggesting that what was reported in some instances as human trafficking could be 'prostitution.' These statements and stances have created uncertainty and contributed to the weak official attitudes and lack of will to eradicate the crime.

The *Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2005* prohibits all forms of trafficking and prescribes penalties, ranging from three years' to life imprisonment. It does not seem, however, that the law is observed or enforced. What is needed is an ambiguous declaration that Guyanese girls are 'not for sale' and effective policing operations to enforce the law.

Indictment

The Guyana Government's 'syndrome of denial' has, at its heart, its annoyance at the uncomfortable comments contained in the annual United States' Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons' *Trafficking in Persons Report*. The USA *Report* for several years repeated with little variation:

Guyana is a source and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Guyanese nationals have been subjected to human trafficking in other countries in the Caribbean region. Cases of human trafficking reported in the media generally involved women and girls in forced prostitution.

Country experts expressed concern that exploitative child labor practices occur within the mining industry, agriculture, and forestry sector. The limited government control of Guyana's vast interior regions, combined with profits from gold mining and the prostitution that accompanies the industry, provide conditions conducive for

trafficking.

The Government of Guyana does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated increased efforts to identify and assist trafficking victims.

Guyana, as a result, was placed on Tier 2 Watch List for a second consecutive year for failing to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking, particularly in the area of law enforcement actions against trafficking offenders.”

This unflattering series of reports, although varying slightly from year to year, rebuked the Guyana administration's failure to curb the crime. A major reason for that failure has been the 'syndrome of denial' of the crime of Trafficking in Persons and the neglect of the victims of the trade.

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It is a well-known fact that underage girls, many of them of Amerindian descent, have been rescued from 'sex camps,' especially in the Cuyuni-Mazaruni Region (No.7).The girls have claimed frequently that they were lured from their homes to take up jobs as shopkeepers in the interior. Upon arrival there, however, they were forced to provide sexual favours to customers, mainly male miners.

The Guyana Women Miners' Organisation, a non-governmental organization, has played an important role both in calling public attention to the crime and in rescuing girls from their jeopardy.

These attitudes, particularly among women members of the PPPC administration, have remained essentially unaltered for nearly a decade. Attitudes among male PPPC officials, however, are just as intractable.

Head of the Presidential Secretariat Dr. Roger Luncheon joined the women's chorus back in June 2009. He pronounced that the US TIP Report was "unsupported by the kind of details of some sort that addresses magnitude."

Bharrat Jagdeo, who was President at that time, took denial to a silly level by threatening to write to United States President Barack Obama to ask him to "review the process of constructing the reports" since they are misleading.

Minister of Home Affairs Clement Rohee, Chairman of the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons, even invented his own local TIP report. Rather than correct the specific problems that the US report identified, the administration simply wrote its own vacuous version in July 2008.

Rohee, presenting his fake report to the public, described it as a "factual and authentic" picture of the nature and magnitude of trafficking in persons. The report, expectedly, determined that trafficking in persons was "not a major problem."

It is delusional to think that ministerial pronouncements, the establishment of ministerial committees and the publication of fake reports can diminish the impact of underlying social and

economic problems, particularly youth unemployment in Amerindian villages, which have contributed to this mainly hinterland crime.

Missing Amerindian Girl

Missing from Guyana Government official media reporting has been any trace of compassion for the women and girls who are victims of trafficking.

Missing from Guyana Government policy also has been any serious effort to vigorously implement its own National Plan of Action to eradicate the crime.

Missing from Guyana Government programmes has been an acknowledgement of the fact that Amerindian girls are the principal, though not exclusive, victims of trafficking.

Trafficking in persons is a tragic reality for girls in Guyana, especially Amerindian girls in the hinterland. The 'syndrome of denial' that there is a problem does not solve crime.

Leader of the Opposition David Granger has repeatedly called for the PPPC administration to intensify anti-trafficking training for police and magistrates; improve policing in 'the hinterland'; increase its efforts to employ more efficient law-enforcement techniques; investigate and convict offenders and enhance assistance for victims of trafficking.

The PPPC administration cannot continue to disregard US Government reports because they are unfavourable or embarrassing. The PPPC administration cannot continue to deny the gravity of the crime and it cannot continue to deny protection to its vulnerable citizens – women and girl children.

The PPPC administration, by its policies and actions must make it clear that Guyanese girls are 'not for sale' and that it is determined to eradicate trafficking in persons in this country.

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At the heart of the Guyana Government's 'syndrome' of denial has been its annual annoyance at the uncomfortable comments contained in the United States' Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons annual Trafficking in Persons Report. The USA report in the past stated soberly that, "Guyana is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor... Amerindian girls are trafficked to brothels near the mining camps and to coastal areas for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude."

The USA report had added, more gravely, that "The Government of Guyana does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, however, it is making significant efforts to do so...Guyana is placed on Tier 2 Watch List for a second consecutive year for failing to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking, particularly in the area of law enforcement actions against trafficking offenders."

Brigadier David Granger is the Leader of the People's National Congress and A Partnership for National Unity and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly of Guyana.