



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION  
DIRECTORATE B  
- POLICY DEPARTMENT -**

**NOTE  
ON THE SITUATION IN GUYANA**

**Abstract:** This note outlines the current situation in Guyana (Georgetown), with special emphasis on agriculture, flooding, governance, security and the upcoming parliamentary elections.

**DGExPo/B/PolDep/Note/2005\_ 240**

**7/10/2005**

**[PE N°]**

**EN**

This note was requested by the European Parliament's Committee for Development

This paper is published in the following languages: English

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Manuscript completed in October 2005

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Brussels, European Parliament, 7 October 2005

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## I. Basic data

### *The Co-operative Republic of Guyana*

**Capital:** Georgetown

**Surface:** 214,969 sq. km

**Population:** 765,283 (July 2005 est.)

**Ethnic groups:** East Indian 51%, Afro-Caribbean 43%, Amerindian 4%, European and Chinese 2%

**Religions:** Christian 50%, Hindu 35%, Muslim 10%, other 5%

**Languages:** English, Amerindian dialects, Creole, Hindi, Urdu

**Literacy Rate:** 98.8% (2003 est.)

**Birth Rate:** 18.45 births/1,000 population (2005 est.)

**Death Rate:** 8.32 deaths/1,000 population (2005 est.)

**Infant Mortality:** 33.26 deaths/1,000 live births (2005 est.)

**Government Type:** Cooperative republic within the Commonwealth

**Independence:** 26 May 1966 (from UK)

**Constitution:** 6 October 1980

**Head of State:** President Bharrat JAGDEO (since 11 August 1999)

**Head of Government:** Prime Minister Samuel HINDS (since December 1997)

**UN Human Development Index (HDI):** HDI 0.720 (107 out of 177)

### Historical Background

The Co-operative Republic of Guyana is situated in Northern South America, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Suriname and Venezuela. It is historically and culturally a part of the Caribbean region. Georgetown hosts the Secretariat of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Guyana has three distinct geographical areas: the coastal zone, the tropical forest zone, and the savannahs. Close to 90 % of the population lives and works in the coastal plain, an area around 10 000 sq km, roughly 5% of the country's total land mass. Over 80% of GDP, including the entire agricultural production and the vast majority of all non-mining industrial activities are concentrated in this area, which is located below sea level, and needs constant protection from the sea.

Originally a Dutch, by 1815 Guyana had become a British possession. Both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom established a plantation-based economy worked by African slaves with sugar and then tobacco as the major crops. The abolition of slavery led to black settlement of urban areas and the importation of indentured servants from India to work the sugar plantations. The 1834 abolition of slavery led the British to seek out other sources of labour and they began to ship indentured workers from India, bringing about a key demographic shift. This colonial legacy has left Guyanese society deeply scarred by racial stereotyping and ethnic division, dividing the population between citizens of African and East Indian origin, the latter group being the largest. This ethnocultural divide has persisted and has led to turbulent politics. Religious divisions are also largely drawn on racial lines; the Afro-Guyanese population is mostly Christian (mainly Protestant), while the East-Indian population is predominantly Hindu with a sizeable Muslim minority. Ethnic composition is estimated to be: East Indian 51 %, Afro-Caribbean 43 %, Amerindian 4 %, European and Chinese 2 %.

After a period of struggle, Guyana gained independence from the United Kingdom on 26 May 1966. The country became a cooperative republic within the Commonwealth four years later in 1970, when the British monarch was replaced by a Guyanese head of state appointed by elected political

representatives. The 1980 Constitution provides for an executive presidency and a unicameral legislature called the National Assembly and commonly referred to as parliament.

Until 1992 the country was ruled mostly by socialist-oriented governments (PNC). The PPP-C came to power in 1992 after what is considered the country's first free and fair election since independence, retaining power since. Cheddi JAGAN was elected president. Upon his death five years later, he was succeeded by his wife Janet, who resigned in 1999 due to poor health. Her successor, Bharrat JAGDEO, was reelected in 2001.

The UK is currently the only EU Member State with a permanent representation in Guyana. The EU Delegation and the British High Commission have contacts on a regular basis.

## II. Political situation

### 1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

Despite a good working democracy and free press, politically motivated civil unrest and sporadic outbreaks of violence - like the riots that ensued after the elections of March 2001 - are recurring obstacles to social and economic progress. A dialogue has been opened between the President and the leader of the opposition in order to help restore stability and establish a framework for co-operation. This was an important start but much remains to be done to ease ethnic tensions. On the economic front, it will depend on the ability of the government to maintain high growth rates and a lessening of economic and social disparities. On the political front, a peaceful future for the country requires a shift away from ethnic divisions.

### 2. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

Guyana has a republican representative system with a strong presidency with some limited regional autonomy.

#### **Executive Branch**

- Head of state:

The head of state is an elected president, who is the leader of the largest party in the National Assembly. Most of the power is centralised within the president's office.

Bharrat JAGDEO is president since 11 August 1999. He assumed presidency after resignation of President Janet JAGAN. Despite his socialist background, he has adopted a moderate approach to government. His victory in the March 2001 elections established a greater degree of legitimacy for his government, which had previously been strongly contested by the opposition.

- Head of government:

Prime Minister Samuel HINDS is head of government since December 1997. He is appointed by the president.

- Cabinet: The Cabinet of Ministers is appointed by the president, and is responsible to the legislature.

- Composition of the national government: The PPP-Civic and TUF coalition holds 28 of the 53 directly elected seats in the National Assembly.

#### **Legislative Branch**

Unicameral National Assembly: 68 seats, 65 elected by popular vote - of whom 53 members elected directly by proportional representation and 12 delegates elected by regional assemblies - 1 elected Speaker of the National Assembly, and 2 nonvoting members appointed by the president; members serve five-year terms.

## **Regional administration**

Guyana is administratively divided in 10 regions: Barima-Waini, Cuyuni-Mazaruni, Demerara-Mahaica, East Berbice-Corentyne, Essequibo Islands-West Demerara, Mahaica-Berbice, Pomeroon-Supenaam, Potaro-Siparuni, Upper Demerara-Berbice, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo. Regions have limited power over their particular affairs and have become more marginal because local elections have not been held for over a decade.

### **3. KEY POLITICAL FIGURES**

#### **Political Parties and Leaders**

Party differences are based on ethnicity rather than politics, with parties split between the Indo-Guyanese (currently in power) and the Afro-Guyanese.

##### Main:

- *People's Progressive Party - Civic* (PPP-C) - Bharrat JAGDEO - Has the support of the larger Indo-Guyanese community; centre-left
- *People's National Congress* (PNC) - Robert Herman Orlando CORBIN - traditional support base is with the urban Afro-Guyanese population; centre-left

##### Others:

- *Alliance for Guyana* (AFG) (includes (GLP) and (WPA)) - Rupert ROOPNARAINÉ
- *Guyana Action Party* (GAP) - Paul HARDY
- *Guyana Labor Party* (GLP)
- *Rise, Organize, and Rebuild* (ROAR) - Ravi DEV
- *The United Force* (TUF) - Manzoor NADIR
- *Working People's Alliance* (WPA) - Rupert ROOPNARAINÉ

Two members of parliament, Khemraj Ramjattan of the PPP-C and Raphael Trotman of the PNC-R have launched a new political party, *Alliance for Change*, and would like to hold the balance between the two main parties in a hung parliament. They are expected to win at best 5% of the votes, mostly from the intelligentsia.

#### **Foreign Affairs Minister**

Clement ROHEE

#### **Political Pressure groups**

- *Civil Liberties Action Committee* (CLAC)
- *Guyana Council of Indian Organizations* (GCIO)
- *Trades Union Congress* (TUC)

### **4. GOVERNANCE**

In June 2005, Commonwealth parliamentary consultant, Sir Michael Davies, reiterated the need for parliament to have greater financial and operational independence from the executive, for improved opportunities for the opposition to raise concerns, and for increased accountability. He also noted that several bills had not become law more than a year after being passed by parliament because the president had not signed them.

The National Assembly has adopted the recommendations of the Constitutional Reform Commission regarding the presidency, which decrease the concentration of presidential power enshrined in the

1980 constitution. Nevertheless, these reforms notwithstanding, the presidency remains a strong centre of power, with a highly centralized, top-down administration, with limited inclusion of other groups.

In one sense, the PNC/R is a formidable opposition party, representing the country's Afro-Guyanese population. However, the party frequently boycotts parliamentary sessions, making it difficult for the government to make progress on national development issues. Little progress in building cross-party relations has been apparent since 2002. The emergence of Raphael Trotman and Khemraj Ramjattan's independent political party *Alliance for Change* to counter the entrenched interests of the two dominant parties could provide a democratic breakthrough for the nation. The new movement could reenergize the currently stagnant political system, providing voters a reason to care and a hope that change might come. Although its prospects are slim until touted institutional reforms are passed.

## **5. ELECTIONS**

Legislative elections must be held at least every five years. Guyana has a history of racially conflictive elections. Internationally recognised fair and free elections took place in 1992, December 1997 and March 2001. Next elections are due mid 2006.

### **2001 elections**

In the March 2001 legislative elections, racial tensions came to the fore, with PNC/R supporters accusing the government of denying them access to suffrage in the run-up to the vote. Protests and isolated incidents of violence were reported before polling day, although international observers reported that the process itself was largely free and fair. Jagdeo won by a comfortable margin, although declaration of this fact did not stop the opposition to contest the election results. Protests erupted on the streets as opposition protestors voiced their discontent at their election defeat and, by implication, the socio-political situation in the country.

At the request of the Government, the EC had carried out in February/March 2000 an Elections Needs Assessment Mission for the support to the organisation of the general elections. This study served as the basis for all donors willing to participate in the financing of the elections (USA, UK, Canada, IDB). The EC financed from SASP IV interests the training of polling day staff in the amount of € 1 million, and € 314 000 was allocated from the Human Rights and Democratisation Budget Line (BL) to finance one long-term observer and 30 short term observers. The observer team was the largest observer group. Both the counter-part funds and the BL funds were managed by the UNDP. The support provided by the EC was highly visible and greatly appreciated.

### **2006 election prospects**

A general election is due by August 2006. The pre-election period will provide ample scope for procedural disputes, with opposition PNC-R questioning the validity of the database used to prepare the electoral roll. However, the opposition PNC-R is unlikely to follow up its threat to boycott the election, since this move might allow an alternative main opposition party to emerge.

As long as party affiliation is determined by traditional ethnic divisions rather than policy frameworks, the support of the largest ethnic group for the PPP-C will ensure its victory, which will create an increasingly unstable political situation. The legitimacy of the 2006 vote is therefore expected to be closely contested and to involve violent clashes between opposing ethnic groups. Minor political parties are favoured by the proportional representation voting system and may therefore make some inroads, but the main opposition party (PNC-R) is unlikely to make major gains.

As smooth running for the elections is essential for the further political stability of Guyana, a substantial technical and financial support for the electoral process is useful, and would reduce the scope for legitimate complaint. The US, Britain, Canada and the EU signed an agreement on July 20th 2005 to provide assistance. As in other recent polls, there will be provision for external observers, and

a code of conduct for the media and political parties. International mediation may also be needed to defuse quarrels between the main players.

## **6. EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

### **Relations with neighbouring countries**

The threat of military conflict between Guyana and Venezuela or Suriname is a remote prospect. However, current tensions between Georgetown and Caracas and Paramaibo should be highlighted, as relations with Venezuela and Suriname are sometimes marred by the controversy concerning the borders of these countries. But dialogue is ongoing. Both countries have claims to Guyanese territory. Guyanese holds a century-old claim to the resource-rich Essequibo region that accounts for two thirds of Venezuelan territory. Suriname and Guyana have been at odds for over 40 years over territorial waters in the Corentyne River, which separates the two nations. The possibility of a dispute with Suriname is moderately higher than the possibility of a dispute with Venezuela, given that the Surinamese government may be more inclined to deflect attention away from domestic concerns to an attempted popularity-reviving incident with Guyana. In 2004, President Jagdeo decided to bring the territorial dispute issue with Suriname to the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS). There is ultimately little political interest on either side in pursuing a military option, and there is also heavy international pressure from regional institutions such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and CARICOM to avoid conflict.

### **Relations with EU**

Development cooperation between Guyana and the EC started under Lome I.

#### 8th EDF

The overall objective of the 8th EDF (1995-2000), is to restore and improve Guyana's production capacity to enable the country to generate income in a sustainable way and to improve its competitiveness on external markets thereby assisting Guyana's gradual integration in the world economy and a better preparation for the challenges of the future including regional, hemispheric and global economic developments in the making. There are two focal sectors for EC funded actions: economic and social infrastructure (85-90 % of the total for sea defences, water and transport) and private sector development. These are the same sectors of concentration as those of the 6th and 7th EDF.

#### 9th EDF

The two areas of concentration proposed for the 9th EDF are infrastructure (sea defences and coastal management) and macro-economic support to social sectors (health and housing) Both of these programs would receive project and/or budgetary sector support. Outside these areas of concentration assistance is proposed for transport sector planning, support to economic actors, strengthening the NAO office, micro-project programme.

Major project activities presently undertaken are:

- 8th EDF Sea Defences Programme (€ 20 million)
- 8th EDF Economic Diversification Project in Linden (€ 12, 5 million )
- 8th EDF Low-income housing (€ 9, 1 million)
- 9th EDF budget support programme (€ 23.3 million)



## **III. Security**

### **Crime**

Increasing levels of crime, particularly in the capital Georgetown, is the principal security concern. In 2002, 142 people were killed in a country of only 750,000; the situation has not improved much since then. Armed robberies had increased 44% over the previous year, and seemingly random murders continue to fill the headlines. Rapes are also a major issue, with 154 reported in 2004. The sources of the violence are many, and include the country's overpowering racial division, brutal political disputes, extreme poverty and powerful drug organizations.

#### Organised Crime

Guyana's role as a transit country for South American cocaine has led to the development of organised criminal groups, some with links to domestic political forces and to international criminal partners. Guyana is now engaged in bilateral agreements with the US and the UK to combat drug trafficking, and the government has implemented a series of plans to tackle the issue. In June the government published a US\$3.4m five-year counter-narcotics strategy. However, 2005 reports question the efficacy of the Guyanese government's plans given the recent involvement of Guyanese nationals in important drug seizures. State officials also have been implicated in drug-related cases. Moreover, the police, customs services and the antinarcotics unit are all under-resourced. Illegal drug trafficking is typically accompanied by violence, and Guyana is no exception to this. However, Guyana is far from attaining the levels of drug-related criminality of Colombia or Venezuela.

#### Crime Prevention

The government has struggled to control the worsening situation. Bharrat Jagdeo's government has taken a series of measures to fight crime. However, the government's response to crime seems to be increasingly ineffective.

### **Political Violence**

Guyana's ethnic divide, embodied in the two main political parties, is the principal source of political unrest, mainly during elections and especially since 1998. In December 1997 and March 2001, there were sustained levels of violent demonstrations in the streets of Georgetown by supporters of the losing PNC party, which alleged that the victorious PPP had resorted to fraud. Demonstrations, assaults, road blockages, vandalism, looting and confrontations with law-enforcement authorities occurred in both Georgetown and outlying areas. The run-up to the 2006 elections could result in a similar situation.

### **Terrorism**

Domestic terrorism does not represent a major threat in Guyana, although ethnic divisions give cause for concern. The September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US resulted in the introduction of anti-terrorism legislation in Guyana in 2002. The Guyanese definition of terrorism is purposely broad in response to the national context, which includes some ethnically motivated attacks on authorities. There are no known terrorist groups operating in the country.

## IV. Human Rights

**Death penalty:** retentionist

**International Criminal Court:** ratified

**United Nations Covenants of 1966:** ratified

**UN Women's Convention:** the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women has been ratified.

The Constitution guarantees Guyanese citizens the fundamental rights and freedoms recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Guyana is also a party to the main international human rights instruments. However, it is the only South American country where homosexuality remains illegal and it is not up to date with its reports to the majority of the treaty-monitoring bodies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which has been waiting for a report since 1978.

### **Death penalty**

Guyana is the only South American country where the death penalty is still in use for ordinary crimes. At the end of 2004, there were at least 25 people on death row, including two women. There were no executions.

### **'Death squad'**

Allegations about abduction, torture and killing of dozens of people since 2002 by a government sponsored anti-crime death squads, whose members allegedly included serving and former police officers, came to light in early 2004. In May, the President announced a commission of inquiry into the alleged involvement in the "death squad" of the Minister of Home Affairs. The murder of a key witness in the investigation demonstrates the urgent need for a comprehensive protection scheme of witnesses in Guyana.

### **Law enforcement officials**

A number of police officers were charged in connection with fatal shootings, some of which were alleged extrajudicial executions but none was convicted. There were at least two deaths in police custody. Some criminal suspects were allegedly tortured or ill-treated immediately after arrest. Police infringed on citizens' privacy rights.

### **Conditions in detention**

Conditions in detention remain harsh and amount in some cases to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The final report of the Disciplined Forces Commission made recommendations to address a range of issues, including rape and ill-treatment in detention. Lengthy pretrial detention continues to be a problem.

### **Violence against women**

In October, the Guyana Human Rights Association expressed concern about the prevalence of violence against women. It denounced the legal system's treatment of victims of sexual violence as systematically and intentionally humiliating. It called for a major campaign, involving government, religious and civic institutions, to hold perpetrators accountable.

## Trafficking in human beings

A number of measures to address trafficking have been announced. These include draft anti-trafficking legislation, with provisions for penalties, restitution and witness protection, and awareness campaigns. Human rights groups welcomed these but stressed that resources were needed for implementation. The Guyana Human Rights Association reported that Amerindian girls from mining communities are being trafficked for forced prostitution.

## V. Economic situation

**Per capita income:** +/- 900 US\$

**GDP growth rate:** 1.9% (2004 est)

**GDP per capita in US\$:** purchasing power parity - \$ 3.800 (2004 est)

**GDP - Composition by sector:** *agriculture:* 38.3 %; *industry:* 19.9 %; *services:* 41.8%

**Agriculture-products:** sugar, rice, wheat, vegetable oils; beef, pork, poultry, dairy products; fish, shrimp

**Arable land:** 2.44 %

**Natural resources:** bauxite, gold, diamonds, hardwood timber, shrimp, fish

**Current account balance:** \$-129.4 million (2004 est.)

**Exports:** \$570.2 million f.o.b. (2004 est.)

**Export commodities:** sugar, gold, bauxite/alumina, rice, shrimp, molasses, rum, timber

**Export partners:** EU 30% (UK 12.1%, Portugal 8.2%, Belgium 6.3%) Canada 24%, US 22%, Jamaica 6.6%

**Imports:** \$650.1 million f.o.b. (2004 est.)

**Import commodities:** manufactures, machinery, petroleum, food

**Import Partners:** US 25%, EU 19% (UK 6.4%) Trinidad and Tobago 21.6%, Cuba 5.9%, China 4.7%

The Guyanese economy has experienced moderate economic growth since 1999, based on an expansion in the agricultural and mining sectors, a more favourable atmosphere for business initiatives, a more realistic exchange rate, fairly low inflation, and the continued support of international organisations. The Guyanese economic growth then slowed in 2003, but came back gradually in 2004, sustained largely by increased export earnings. Guyana is highly dependent on trade because of its small economic base. The major exports are sugar, rice, gold and bauxite. The country's main trading partners remain the United States, the EU - mainly the United Kingdom - and Canada. Chronic problems include a shortage of skilled labour and a deficient infrastructure. The government is juggling a sizable external debt against the urgent need for expanded public investment. Low prices for key mining and agricultural commodities combined with troubles in the bauxite and sugar industries threaten the government's already tenuous fiscal position and dim prospects for the future.

### Agriculture

Agriculture accounts for more than 30% of GDP. Sugar and its by-products, followed by rice, provide the majority of agricultural exports. The two industries are inter-linked in that poorer rice farmers often earn the bulk of their income from working on the sugar plantations. Guyana will face falling prices for its rice and sugar as preferential tariffs are eroded.

#### Sugar

The Guyanese sugar industry is the largest in the Caribbean and one of the most significant contributors to the national economy, accounting for about 17% of GDP and 28% of export earnings. It also remains one of the country's major employers with at least 125,000 people depending on it for

their livelihood. It is largely run by Guysuco which employs more people than any other industry and is politically very difficult for the government to “privatise”. Guyana therefore is in a particularly vulnerable position due to the European Union reforms that would end the country's preferential access for sugar to the EU market.

Guyana has tried both to diversify away from sugar dependency and to modernise the industry to face the challenge of competition from more efficient producers. The government-supported strategy has been to invest heavily in modern factory facilities, such as the \$ 135 million Skeldon estate, which is being partially financed by a soft loan from China. However, EU policy is now to encourage factory closures. The changes could force two factories to close and lead to 8,000 direct job losses, according to the Guyana High Commission in London. Continuing economic diversification initiatives is the major priority in the trade area. Fishery - especially shrimps - has the best potential. Another option would be Guyana's plan to reduce its oil import bill by producing ethanol from sugarcane. Guyana is planning to do so with the assistance of Brazil, which will provide the necessary technology. Production of the fuel is expected to begin next year.

*EU Sugar reform:* see the separate background note on the Commission's proposal

### Rice

Rice is the second largest agricultural sub-sector in Guyana. The country's economy is heavily dependent on its rice industry, as it accounts for approximately 4% of Guyana's total GDP, 14% of the country's total exports and 11% of the country's foreign exchange earnings, which are vital to the economy. Rice is essentially an export-oriented industry with about 70% of Guyana's total rice production being exported. Approximately 14% of Guyana's entire population (families, workers in the rice mills, exporters, input suppliers, etc) rely on rice production, the vast majority of whom are small-scale farmers.

### *External trading arrangements: the European Union*

The European Union has traditionally been Guyana's largest export market for rice. At present well over half of all Guyana's rice exports go to the EU. As a member of the ACP group of countries, Guyana receives preferential access for its products into the EU market. Guyana can export rice to the EU through two distinct routes, the direct ACP route or the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) route, which are governed by different conditions.

There are presently three separate quotas in the system established by the EU to control ACP rice exports entering the EU market:

- 125,000 tonnes husked rice equivalent (whole grain) (ACP direct route)
- 20,000 tonnes broken rice (ACP direct route)
- 35,000 tonnes husked rice equivalent (whole grain) (OCT route)

Guyana exports well in excess of 100,000 tonnes of whole grain rice to the EU annually and fills the bulk of the ACP and OCT quotas.

Rice that is exported via the OCT route enters the EU duty-free. This is the reason that prior to the quota being implemented in 1997 the bulk of Guyana's rice went to the EU through the OCT route. It is also one of the reasons why the restriction of the OCT route had such a negative impact. When the bulk of Guyana's rice could no longer enter the EU via a route that was duty-free it had to enter through the ACP direct route which does attract a tariff and this contributed to a decrease in the revenue received by Guyana's rice exporters.

The EU is supporting the rice sector through a specific programme funded by the European Development Fund. The programme is designed to increase productivity in the cultivation and marketing of rice produced in the Caribbean so that the region improves its competitive position in the international market while optimising regional self-sufficiency. Guyana has received financial assistance from the European Commission to develop its rice industry. The funds are to be used for a

range of activities including research and development to investigate potential markets and products to allow the industry to expand in order to compete with the cheaper Asian suppliers Thailand and Vietnam.

European Union Commissioner for Trade Peter Mandelson met representatives of the Caribbean Rice Association (CRA) while on a visit to Guyana during January 2005 for talks with Caribbean Trade Ministers and local commodities' producers. Mr. Mandelson and the CRA discussed the preferential regime for rice imported into the EU and the start and implementation phases of the € 24 million EU support programme to the rice industry in the Caribbean.

#### **Medium term challenges:**

- To maintain and improve the economic infrastructure to create the conditions for future economic growth. This includes the rehabilitation of the sea defences which protect the coastal strip, where 90% of the population live and where most of the economic (mainly agricultural) activity takes place.
- To enhance the country's productive capacity through investment in modernising the sugar and rice industries.
- To lay the foundation for the longer-term needs of the economy. Future economic growth will depend on the country's ability to develop new products (economic diversification), in new locations (regional development) and to find new export markets (regional integration).

## **VI. Flooding**

Floods are a constant threat during rainy seasons, which run from December to January and again from May to June. The largest flood to hit the country in more than a century occurred in January 2005. The most populated area of the country - the coastal region, that is barely above sea level - was affected, hitting 39% of Guyana's population, over half of them being women and almost one third being children under nine years. The overall economic effect approximated 60% of the GNP and mainly hit the agricultural and commerce sectors. The severe flooding in January 2005 added to Guyana's economic difficulties and, although international aid trickled into the country, the timing of the disaster soon after the Asian Tsunami left the South American country poorly resourced.

Guyana's government initiated a massive flood relief effort, which was supported by the many international donor agencies of which the European Commission played a major role, as ECHO released US\$ 1.8 million. Local and international non-governmental organizations, the CARICOM, North American countries and neighbouring countries also assisted in the relief operations, as did the United Nations system in Guyana.

The Guyana floods have demonstrated that disaster preparedness, in a country that knew it was vulnerable, was almost non-existent. The coastal region is protected by complex sea defences that need constant cleaning and maintenance, which has not always happened. If the sea level keeps rising, even this complex system - consisting of an elaborate network of dams, dykes and ditches - will be ineffective. The hydraulic works needed are far larger in scale and cost than the country can undertake alone.

ECHO launched its 5th DIPECHO (for Disaster Preparedness ECHO) Action Plan for the Caribbean. € 3.5 million will be allocated for disaster preparedness in the region. The Action Plan includes supporting strategies that enable local communities and institutions to better prepare for natural disasters by enhancing their capacities to cope. The financing will focus on the strengthening of capacity/training at the local level, with the direct participation of beneficiary communities. Furthermore, activities supported under the new DIPECHO Action Plan will include the following: the setting of early warning systems; small scale infrastructure mitigation works aimed at reducing physical vulnerability of beneficiaries, like protection walls along riverbanks, drainage works,

reforestation; map-making and computerisation of data connected with the study of risks, vulnerability and the development of emergency plans; research and dissemination of technical studies, workshops and their results in order to increase knowledge on risk reduction issues.

The European Commission has decided to approve an additional €996,500 in aid for victims of floods in Guyana, to follow up on previous decisions worth €1.7 million. The decisions will be managed by ECHO. The two first decisions (worth a total of €1.7 million) provided for emergency needs: relief items, health, water and sanitation, nutrition and some agricultural rehabilitation for the most vulnerable. This €1 million will complement the previous decisions by providing livelihood support and disaster preparedness for the most vulnerable families affected by the floods. It is estimated that 7,320 individuals will receive help for their agricultural production. About 15,000 families (or 60,000 individuals) will benefit from projects designed to increase their ability to cope with future disasters.

Because of the current vulnerabilities, the new rainy season due in two months could generate new floods of catastrophic consequences in the affected areas.

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