

# Press Release



## **GECOM cannot be held responsible for the delays in meeting with the AFC**

**17<sup>th</sup> December, 2024 GEORGETOWN** – In light of recent statements made by two leading members of the Alliance for Change (AFC), we find it imperative to address and debunk two significant pieces of disinformation regarding the integrity and operations of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). Acting on the foundation that disinformation and misinformation undermine public trust in democratic institution processes, and it is crucial that we clarify these issues with accurate information.

Recently, Mr. Nigel Hughes, Leader of the AFC, in responding to a query from the floor regarding whether his Party had conducted any review of the 2020 General and Regional Elections, claimed that his Party could not conduct such review on the pretext they were awaiting a meeting with GECOM and that the outcome of such meeting would help the Party to better conduct a review. This statement was supported by Mr. David Patterson, Chairman of the AFC, who claimed that GECOM had refused to meet with the AFC.

The truth in this matter is as follows:

The AFC wrote a letter dated September 9, 2024, addressed to Mr. Vishnu Persaud, Chief Election Officer (CEO), requesting a meeting for the new Executive of this Party to be apprised of “GECOM’s preparations for future elections and how it intends to address burning issues about electoral integrity.” The CEO wrote a response dated September 11, 2024, copied to the GECOM Chairman, advising the AFC that he (CEO) does not have the authority to arrange meetings on behalf of the Commission and that the letter should be addressed to the Chairman.

Taking the cue from receipt of the copy of the CEO’s correspondence to the AFC, GECOM Chairman, Justice of Appeal (Ret.d) Claudette Singh proactively wrote the AFC a letter dated September 23, 2024, with reference to their September 9, 2024 letter to the CEO, and requested that the Party indicate whether October 8 or 22, 2024, would be convenient for a delegation to meet with GECOM.

It was not until October 17, 2024 that the Party wrote the GECOM Chairman expressing regrets for the delay in responding and noting that this lapse was due to overseas travel by the Leader and other key executive members.

The Chairman promptly responded by way of a letter dated October 18, 2024, requesting that the AFC, as per the norm for meetings with Political Parties, provide a list of issues and concerns the Party is desirous of addressing and that, upon receipt, a new date would set for the requested meeting. The AFC responded through a letter dated November 11, 2024, in which the following matters were listed for discussion with the Commission: -

- GECOM's reasons for rejecting the introduction of biometrics as a tool for improving the credibility of all electoral processes;
- GECOM'S willingness to allow party scrutineers to vote on the same date as the Disciplined Forces;
- GECOM's views on the willingness to support, the purging of the List of Electors of persons who are not ordinarily resident in Guyana, or deceased.

Due to demanding matters that were engaging the attention of the Commission at the time of receipt of the AFC's last letter, the Chairman responded on November 27, 2024 inviting the AFC to a meeting on the December 3, 2024. To date, no response has been received.

An amateur analysis of the foregoing would reveal beyond any doubt that (i) the three matters listed above as areas of interest to the AFC can help no one, including the AFC, with a review of the 2020 General and Regional Elections, and (ii) GECOM is not responsible for the meeting between GECOM and the AFC not having been held as yet. Further, the allegations made by Mr. Hughes and Mr. Patterson are not supported by factual evidence and serve only to sow discord among Stakeholders regarding the electoral process.

In view of the foregoing, we urge all political leaders to engage in responsible discourse based on verified facts rather than unfounded claims that can mislead voters and erode trust in the Commission. It is essential that the maintenance of confidence in GECOM can rely on accurate information during discussions on critical issues such as the preparations for and conduct of elections.

While operating in line with the relevant statutory provisions and in accordance with its own set policy for engagement, GECOM recognizes that it is subject to oversight from multiple independent local and international organizations, all of which are focused on compliance with standards associated with transparency and accountability in our electoral processes. Accordingly, the Commission, as in this case, will take steps to ensure that all Stakeholders are kept accurately informed about its operations including the conduct of General and Regional Elections in 2025.

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