

**Remarks by Chargé d’Affaires  
Bryan Hunt  
Cara Lodge Hotel  
249 Quamina Street  
South Cummingsburg,  
Georgetown, Guyana  
Wednesday, September 16, 2015**

Honorable Vice President and Minister of Public Security, Mr. Kemraj Ramjattan,  
Coordinator of the Task Force on Narcotics, Drugs, and Illicit Weapons,  
Mr. Michael Atherley,  
Organization of American States Representative, Mr. Jean Ricot Dorneus,  
Canadian High Commissioner, Mr. Pierre Giroux,  
Ms. Tiffany Barry,  
Mr. Pernell Clark,  
Moderator Daniel Kumar  
Distinguished Representatives from the Government of Guyana,  
Representatives from the National Youth Council and Social Life Issues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen and  
Members of the Press Corps,

I am very pleased to be here today for the release of the results of this critically important Guyana Secondary School Drug Prevalence Survey. The Government of the United States of America is proud to have contributed funding to this important project and grateful to the Organization of American States for its work in bringing it to fruition. We hope that the information we learn today will help us all in our efforts to reduce drug use in Guyana, particularly among what is arguably our most cherished demographic, our youth. Our shared goals are to learn the scope of the problem, and to identify ways and means by which we can provide alternatives to drug use among young people.

We have learned in the United States that we cannot arrest our way out of the drug problem. Instead, success requires a balanced approach that tries to eliminate both the supply and demand for drugs. Educating young people about the dangers of drug use is certainly an important part of this approach, but I would argue that it needs to go further. If we are to have success in reducing demand for drugs among this demographic, we must have a better understanding of the reasons why young people decide to experiment with drugs in the first place. In short, we must identify and address the root causes of such drug use. Whether it is as an attempt to escape from feelings of depression, powerlessness, and hopelessness or as a response to peer pressure, the fact is too many Guyanese young people are increasingly looking to drug use as a way out, and more must be done to curtail this trend.

At the U.S. Embassy we stand ready to work with government agencies, non-government organizations, the private sector, and all those who want to help reduce drug use among the youth in our society. We have a shared responsibility to educate our young people on the ill effects of drug use and to find creative ways to address this growing issue. But to do so effectively, we need knowledge, which is what is being provided here today. My hope is that as stakeholders consider the information contained in this report, it will motivate you to develop new, more valid programs that will effectively curb drug use among Guyanese young people.

Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, the United States has committed to continuing working with the Government of Guyana and other stakeholders in the region to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking. We are trying to help train police officers in the areas of criminal investigations and professional responsibility. We are providing logistical and maintenance support to security and law enforcement entities and our Security Cooperation Office has provided assets such as riverine patrol boats and communication equipment to stem the flow of drugs into the region. We have worked with our British colleagues to assist the Guyana government in the establishment and training of the Serious Organized Crime Unit. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is preparing to embark on a cooperative effort to increase the capacities of both the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit and the Guyana Police Force Anti-Narcotics Force.

At the same time, we are trying to work directly with at-risk youth to give them new opportunities in order to prevent their victimization through crime and drug use. Through the USAID Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment (SKYE) Program, we have provided life and work skills that have been identified as critical by public and private sector employers in Guyana. Over 1600 youth have graduated from the program and in excess of 650 youth have been linked to long term employment. By providing new hope to these youths, their families, and their communities, we hope to assist

Guyana in stemming the tide of youth crime and violence that too often has dominated the national news headlines in this country.

Going forward, it will be important that all stakeholders – government, private sector, international donors, and civil society organizations – redouble our efforts to address the underlying causes of drug use among Guyana’s youth. It is my hope that the discussion begun here today will result in concrete interventions that have a direct impact on the lives of young people in this country.

Thank you very much.