

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS:

1. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS OF YOUR COUNTRY?

Civil society organisations play a very important role in national development and as such the EMB strives to maintain good working relationships with a range of interest groups.

These groups tend to focus on issues such as:

- democratic development and electoral reform; (Electoral Assistance Bureau)
- good governance; (Donor Community)
- combating corruption; (Trade Unions e.g. Public Service Union)
- women's empowerment; (Women Lawyers Association)
- religious or ethnic tolerance; (Inter-Religious Organisation)
- reforming legal systems; (Guyana Bar Association)
- rights for people with disabilities; (Commission on the Rights of the Child)
- civic education; (Guyana Manufacturers Association)
- public sector reform; or (Private Sector Commission)
- human rights. (Guyana Human Rights Association)

Consultations with civil society organizations allow their specific needs to be channelled directly to the EMB which discusses, addresses and publicises their concerns in their *programmes*.

EMB's may also establish positive relationships with civil society organisations by using them as partners to implement electoral activities, for example, in training temporary electoral staff, or in implementing civic voter education programs.

THE CONTEXT

The pre-election period was characterized by major disagreements among political parties on the voters' lists, eligibility of non-residents to vote, dissent within GECOM and an outbreak of violence shortly following Nomination Day. These issues engendered a general sense of unease among the population and fuelled speculation regarding violence and the prospects of a constitutional crisis.

QUALITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS:

The reports by EAB Observers confirm that GECOM polling officials in general carried out their duties in a dignified and efficient manner and that the electorate was generally cooperative and conducted their business peacefully. The overall results of the elections for polling places where EAB placed observers were found to be credible.

THE MEDIA:

The media, both print and electronic public and private are concerned with informing and educating the public about democracy and elections.

In order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the media, the EMB needs a media relations strategy. Such a strategy promotes regular positive contact with the media and allows for access to accurate information on the EMB's activities.

ELEMENTS OF A MEDIA RELATIONS STRATEGY:

- Identifying the relevant media and their coverage;
- Identifying the key people who can ensure accurate and prominent reporting of activities;
- Being proactive and transparent in releasing information;
- Ensuring that information provided is clear and easy to understand;
- Developing a time-table for a steady flow of accurate information to the media;
- Creating one PR person for the media and one administrative contact for the media; and
- Setting up a Media Centre to deal with Media issues.

It is always advisable to establish a full-time unit within the EMB to assume responsibility for media relations with a well respected media person to co-ordinate operation.