

GGMC – 37th Anniversary Remarks

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I recognise the presence of former Commissioners and employees of GGMC, and miners - past and present, all of whom have made a monumental contribution to the growth, development and continuation of the mining industry. Today, I bring congratulatory greetings on behalf of H.E. President David Granger, Hon. Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo, Members of Cabinet and indeed the entire Government of Guyana for the noteworthy contributions you have each made to the development of the extractive industries in Guyana. We know that the GGMC was formed out of the early British Geological Surveys with the express purpose of exploring and discovering economic mineral resources for the British Empire, and we have heard of the pioneering exploits of Robert Schomburgk, the Prussian who pioneered the surveying and mapping of the then Guiana's resources. Today, even with satellites and GPS mapping, the work is still the same – laborious, difficult, and dangerous, and yet at the same time, so exciting and rewarding for those who dare to be brave and inquisitive.

Today, GGMC remains a preeminent institution of State that carries the responsibility of ensuring that the patrimony of the state, the gifts of God as I would like to refer to them, are bequeathed, shared and enjoyed equally and equitably by all Guyanese for today; for tomorrow; and for the centuries and millennia ahead. This is the sacred responsibility placed into our hands and one that we must discharge faithfully and committedly. There is no avoiding, escaping or diluting this responsibility.

President Granger talks about the “six sisters” – the drivers of economic growth – rice, sugar, gold, diamond, bauxite and timber,” Today, it is easy to recognize that the GGMC is responsible for three of the six, and on them, the economy of Guyana, and our fellow Guyanese brothers and sisters, are now totally dependent. This is a heavy responsibility that should not be treated lightly. For many centuries, sugar ruled the day and then for decades, it was bauxite. In our contemporary times, it is gold that undergirds the economy. Gold declarations for June 2016 have reached 327,000 ounces - with a projected target of 600, 000 ounces by the end of the year.

After 37 years as a Commission, and on this and every anniversary occasion, while it is a good thing to celebrate, it is also important to reflect on the past and to analyse performance so that stock could be taken of the gaps; as times have changed. The Commission must see itself in an endless and continuous process of renewal and

adaption to remain both current to every changing technologies and to demands of stakeholders – be they small, medium or large in size – all are important. Over the years, a locally driven gold and diamond mining sector has emerged and continues to hold its own, and in so doing, through its operations some 120,000 plus individuals are directly and indirectly positively affected, and so too, numerous commercial endeavors including, a local and regional Air Services sector, interior communications networks by roads and rivers and an emerging diversification of commercial resources.

The nation has observed that the GGMC continues to perform in the face of challenges and that it has been quite responsive to the myriad of issues that confronts it on a daily basis. We have observed that security of tenure/tenure conflicts are typical frustrations. And, we have heard first-hand the broad complaints about the unbecoming behavior of a few GGMC officers in the field and elsewhere. Likewise, we have received a litany of complaints from the miners about the inadequacy of technical and financial support and availability of mining lands for miners, particularly at the small scale level. There are still a number of challenges hampering the sector that must be fixed forthwith to realize its true potential. This includes the reviewing of the management and organizational structure of the Commission itself.

At this juncture it is appropriate to note, that in every endeavor or area of independent employment, a certain significant level of responsibility has to be placed on the proprietor to be knowledgeable, adaptable, qualified, etc. especially when huge sums of monies are involved. The Gold, Diamond and mining industry is no different - The mining community has to do a little more to regulate itself, in fact aspects of the Act and Regulations contemplates that to be the case.

In general terms however, at the governmental and policy level, we have identified the priorities that will inform the way forward. These are the priorities that will guide the Commission over the coming years and can be placed into two (2) categories – 1) those that address the continual improvement of GGMC as an organization; and 2) those that address issues that are pertinent to miners, stakeholders, and the mining and petroleum sectors.

The organisational priorities will be:

- (i) To enhance the somewhat dull and misguided image of the mining sector in general, and of the GGMC in particular, by promoting greater levels of research, surveys, efficiency, transparency, order and accountability.
- (ii) To create opportunities for the further development of the human resources of the organization, through investment in training at all levels and the fashioning of a succession plan.
- (iii) To tackle the more demanding challenges hindering the sector, by developing a Mining Policy Framework to inform its long-term development.

- (iv) To reorient the Guyana Mining School & Training Centre to urgently equip it to become an institution of excellence capable of training and equipping staff and stakeholders to enter and function in the new world of petroleum exploration and mining.
- (v) To focus more attention on bauxite production and other minerals that are seen as less attractive.
- (vi) To see issues of land reclamation and environmental security as important to mining as removing the mineral itself.

The priorities to miners' and stakeholders' will be:

- (i) To promote Occupational Health and Safety in mining. There are too many deaths and accidents being recorded.
- (ii) To make available higher yielding lands for all categories of miners
- (iii) To promote higher standards in mining technologies to improve recovery.
- (iv) To improve better monitoring and compliance of mining activities in accordance with the Mining Act and Regulations.
- (v) To provide technical support and assistance to the industry in the furtherance of best practices in the industry while continuing to invest in geological surveys.

Now, the world's attention is riveted on us as we are about to step onto the privileged threshold of prosperity shared and enjoyed by a select group of oil and gas producing nations. The benefits are exciting to behold and exponentially bountiful in every respect, and needless to say, the burdens that accompany all benefits can be catastrophic if we mismanage this opportunity. As with all success stories, there must be consequences to address such as safety, security, observance of the law, preservation of the fragile environment, compliance with the instruments that are in place to safeguard the mining community, and just as importantly as well, preserving the state's patrimony. The Petroleum Division of the GGMC is scheduled to undergo some necessary changes to ensure its transformation into becoming a responsive regulatory agency that can scrutinize and hold to account, the oil companies whether they drill onshore or off. Legislation to give effect to these changes will be shared soon for comments and suggestions for placement before the National Assembly later this year.

The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana will continue to work with the GGMC; its management, staff and Board of Directors to ensure that efficiency and integrity, the pillars for sustaining the mining industry, are in place, are respected and upheld, and that the well-being of all stakeholders is enhanced. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the issue of the GPSU's proposal for an across the board increase for 2015 has thankfully been resolved.

The GPSU and GGMC have agreed to a "one off" payout across the board that is 6 weeks of pay based on Jan.1 2015 salaries. Government sees this as an indication of goodwill and a recognition of an improved attitude within the theatre of our work. We expect that it will also be seen as an incentive to continue on the trajectory of doing better especially where better is needed. To whom much is given much will be required. I recognise the efforts of Mr. Dennison and team and Mr. Patrick Yarde and the Branch Manager and other representatives of the GPSU in achieving this result. Congratulations!

I feel blessed and honoured to be the Minister of Natural Resources with responsibility for overseeing the national patrimony; privileged to have been invited by you to make these brief remarks; and excited about the prospects of working closer with you to build a beneficial, respectful and satisfying working relationship. Now that the sister agencies of the EPA and the Protected Areas Commission are returning to a home in the Ministry of the Presidency, we have more time to dedicate our energies to making mining safer, more efficient, and more productive.

Best wishes in your work and may God protect you as you traverse the roadways, trails, and by-ways of our beautiful country as you endeavor to provide a service to the people of Guyana. And, as you do so, it is my hope and desire that you will exude a deep sense of pride and satisfaction that you have done well for yourselves and your country.

The nation depends on you to do your best for its people.

Thank you.