

July 24, 2016

**From: DAVID HALES, AMBASSADOR OF GUYANA (DESIGNATE) TO BELGIUM  
AND TO THE EUROPEAN UNION  
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**To: THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS (IFES)  
2011 Crystal Drive  
Arlington  
Virginia 22202  
United States of America**

I, the undersigned, am hereby nominating **Dr. Robert Stephen Surujbally** for the prestigious **Joe C. Baxter Award - 2016**.

The Republic of Guyana is deeply indebted to Dr. Surujbally. Under his leadership the electoral turbulence which was associated with and was a consequence of lack of confidence in the polling processes has been replaced by transparent and credible elections — fair, and free from fear. He is the longest serving Chairman of an Elections Management Body (EMB) in this hemisphere and is trusted and recognized locally and externally, regionally as an exemplar for good Elections Management.

Steadfastly pursuing and adhering to the principles anchored in elections best practice, four elections have been conducted under his stewardship. Based on his integrity, strength of character and his ability to secure the cooperation of contending political forces, Guyana has experienced, over the last fifteen (15) years peaceful elections including the long overdue Local Government Elections held earlier this year. On account of his successful leadership, Chairman Surujbally has been commended by his global peers.

His commitment to promoting electoral best practice throughout the Region and beyond has resulted in his unanimous election as Chairman of the Association of Caribbean Electoral Organizations (ACEO). That Organization has benefited from Dr. Surujbally's leadership and achieved many successes (see Report attached as Appendix I).

In terms of his expertise in actual Elections Management which now ensures sustainable transparency, freedom and fearlessness in casting of the ballot, the following summarises Dr. Surujbally's major achievements:

- In 2001, there was a well-received (by stakeholders, including Political Parties) **introduction of a 3-year Plan** for the future functioning of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).
- **Periodic (twice annually) Voter Registration was introduced** with the objective of purifying the Final Voters List (Official List of Electors) for the 2006 elections. New ID Cards, with meaningful security features, were produced. At Dr. Surujbally's insistence, **Political Party Scrutineers were introduced to accompany GECOM Staff, during the Registration process and then later, on Elections Day, when each Polling Station and Scrutineer had relevant data (via folios) in their possession.**
- In 2008 he supervised a nation-wide **House-to-House (H-to-H) Registration exercise** resulting in a new List of Electors which was anchored in the National Register of Registrants Database. Dr. Surujbally was able to convince Parliament to release funds for the Registration undertaking. Such an exercise was never attempted previously.
- **Voter Registration was decentralized**, so as to make it easier for voters to register pan-Guyana.
- **New Voter Registration Forms**, with concomitant **fingerprint capture and cross-matching were introduced.**
- Introduction of a self-regulatory **Media Code of Conduct** (see Appendix II) which, under GECOM's monitoring, was compiled by the practitioners, Editors-in-Chief and proprietors themselves, and to which they adhered. This resulted in more temperate reporting without resort to the hitherto overtly scandalous and libelous media reportage.
- In 2011 and again in 2015, when all believed that contesting Political Parties would not sit together and work out a **pre-, peri-, and post-Election Code of Conduct**, GECOM, under Dr. Surujbally's leadership, accomplished this feat (see Appendix III).
- **The Civic and Voter Education Department** was strengthened with the help of Specialist intervention - supported by personnel from Donor Agencies. The already politically conscious electorate became even more knowledgeable about electoral systems and why they must vote.
- Day-to-day **Elections Management was in 2006 enhanced by Donor supported consultants** including Pablo Galarce (of IFES), and Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, the latter himself being a Joe C. Baxter Awardee. Experts were also utilized to assist in **Institutional Capacity Building** (including a **Code of Conduct for GECOM staff and the restructuring of the Organization Chart.**
- The **strengthening of the Information Technology Division** of GECOM was successfully undertaken. New and entirely modern IT systems with their accompanying relevant hardware and software were introduced. **GECOM's Information Technology Operation Manual was introduced.**
- **A Legal Department was commissioned** and led by a competent Legal Officer.
- **Lacunae, contradictions, ambiguities, significant omissions in the laws were identified and pertinent changes made.**
- Rules of Procedure were established relative, *inter alia*, to:
  - (i) Recruitment and Appointment of Staff
  - (ii) Staff Development and Training
  - (iii) The Disciplinary Process
  - (iv) Promotions

- (v) Financial Processes
- (vi) Public Relations
- (vii) Logistics
- Senior Officers were exposed (overseas) to new and improved methodologies in Elections Management, as well as to Workshops dealing with specific electoral topics
- **Joint International Technical Assessors** were employed before, during and after every General and Regional Elections.
- **Public Awareness campaigns and Consultations** with Political Parties, Private Sector Commission, Religious Organizations, Town Hall-type Meetings with the electorate were carried out.
- With increasing frequency, prior at all elections, the **Preliminary Voters Lists were further sanitized and Claims and Objections Periods implemented**, so as to have a **near-perfect Final Voters List**.

It may seem that these highlights are normal electoral practice in an Election Management Body. However, prior to Dr. Surujbally's arrival to head GECOM, none of the activities was carried out in an acceptable manner with acceptable standards.

- Dr. Surujbally, leading his Team and with the help of USAID and others, has been able to increase the **participation of youth** in electoral matters (see Appendix IV).
- **Women**, since Dr. Surujbally's arrival, now **make up the majority of Polling Day Staff**, and generally staff within GECOM; **6 of 11 Heads of Department are women**; (See an explanatory document entitled "Accessorial Notes to the Discussion on Strengthening Womens' Political Participation across the Commonwealth — Commonwealth Electoral Network Conference, July 2016 (Appendix V).

Dr. Surujbally's stewardship has led to:

- (I) His receipt of the prestigious Hind Rattan, the Navrattan Awards, and the **Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Gold Medal Award** (presented at the House of Lords, London). These awards are bestowed on a select group of successful persons whose fore parents originated in India.
- (II) His selection by the Organization of American States (OAS), Commonwealth Secretariat, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) to be part of Elections Observer Mission in Africa, Asia, Americas, and the Caribbean. He was the **Head-of-Mission of the CARICOM Observer Group at the most recent Haitian Elections**.

Based on his experiences, Dr. Surujbally has compiled a “Vademecum (Handbook/Manual) of **Standards for Elections Observer Missions**” (vide supra). This document has been shared with the Union of South American Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the CARICOM Secretariat, the OAS, the Carter Center, and with EMBs around the world (See Appendix VI).

## **OTHER RECOGNITION**

- 1) **Jean-Pierre Kingsley:** “A word of thanks for all your dedication and effort for an idea whose time will come. You are simply ahead of your time”.
- 2) **John Hollins** (Chairman of the Delian Project) “Dreaming permits each and every one of us to be quietly and safely insane every night of our lives”.  
Thanks so much for making us part of your dream. **I am so proud to have worked with you on this Project.**  
Your efforts have helped us shape “The Delian Project”, hence our success grows from your willingness to take a chance - and the lesson we have learned. **Your vision and leadership may be temporarily delayed in Guyana.....”**
- 3) **Dr. Nicole Giles**, Canadian High Commissioner: “I continue to be amazed by your dedication, sharp mind and generosity”  
“Another example of what can be accomplished when **a country is fortunate enough to have a tenacious and charismatic Chairman**”.
- 4) **President Carter** had warm and encouraging words of congratulations at the successful completion of the 2015 General and Regional Elections.
- 5) In the **Commonwealth 60-year Jubilee Yearbook** under the heading “Exemplary Development of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the authors wrote “The establishment of Rules of Procedure governing every facet of GECOM’s undertakings together with the implementation of comprehensive Development Plans ensured the much needed stability. A functional menu of measures was introduced to counter any element which had the potential of social and electoral disruption.”
- 6) **The Princeton University Publication** (2011) entitled “Innovations for Successful Societies: Cooling Elections Tensions” details how the GECOM under leadership of Dr, Surujbally was able to deliver a free and peaceful elections in 2006 despite Guyana’s deep fractures”

Ladies and gentlemen of the Panel that will adjudicate on Dr. Surujbally’s nomination for the Joe C. Baxter Award, please allow me to state that this gentleman has done so much for the Guyana Elections Commission and for our country, that it would be an honour for us all, should Dr. Surujbally receive the award. Because of Dr. Surujbally and his Team, **Guyanese can boast of**

**an electoral process capable of achieving ISO Certification, and capable of exporting tested and proven methodologies and systems to less fortunate electoral jurisdictions.**

Thank you.

**David Hales**

Ambassador of the Republic of Guyana (designate)  
to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union