

# **Vilifying our Volunteer Community Police**

by Janet Jagan - 2009

It probably ranks as the worst of all cartoons published in Guyana. It is not only offensive in many ways, but it is elitist in attitude. I refer to a cartoon last week in Stabroek News which demeans neighbourhood policing. The cartoon by Mr P. Harris, shows the Home Affairs Minister with his hand on the shoulder of a drunken man in rags next to a policeman. The Minister is praising the community police, pictured as a drunken, disreputable man.

The meaning is quite clear. Community police are no good, drunken beggars. Stabroek News has demonstrated its utmost contempt for what is, probably, the largest group of volunteers in our society, men who sacrifice their leisure hours to patrolling and protecting the people in the area in which they live.

There is no other way of reading the meaning of this cartoon which literally slanders and “puts down” a fairly large segment of our population, who, by their voluntary work, provide protection to thousands of Guyanese.

This programme of Community Policing has been in effect for many years, beginning in the days when the PNC held office and when the “break down the door” form of crime was prevalent.

It took many years before this action by volunteers began for the Police Department to accept this movement that was gradually spreading across Guyana. At first, there was a nominal acceptance of community police with one or two from each village or area being made rural constables. Later firearms were cautiously provided, but kept at police stations when the volunteers’ night watch was over.

Now, however, community police are a recognized adjunct to the regular police force with officers being attached to service these areas.

No argument is necessary to recognize that crime is increasing, not only in Guyana, but all over the world. The statistics on crime are overwhelming. Crime has reached unprecedented numbers in the Caribbean, with Trinidad, Jamaica and our own Guyana racing for first place. Little Antigua has had so many murders of tourists that it is already feeling the results in a drop in the number of tourists entering the country.

A Trinidadian columnist for the Sunday Chronicle Linda Hutchinson-Jafar wrote this in October. “Another year is soon coming to a close and for Trinidadians and Tobagonians, it will end as the bloodiest in their 46 years as an independent nation. Equally startling is the public perception that government and the security forces of the land have lost the battle against the criminals as blood continues to spill daily in homes, on the street, and in vehicles.”

Another example of how frightening is the rise in crimes comes from Mexico with a Reuters report saying that “A gruesome crime wave is shaking Mexico to its core, with children murdered, headless bodies left in piles and ordinary Mexicans losing the little faith they have in the police and government.”

In Britain, the crime wave has moved into former soldiers who served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Reports state that some 8,500 former soldiers are in custody for violent offences and make up at least 9% of the UK prison population.

The dramatic rise in crime throughout the world appears to be a phenomenon of the late 20th century and the present 21st century.

In Guyana, unlike many countries, we are fortunate to have thousands of volunteers, in all parts of our country, giving up their free time to patrolling their villages and holding down attacks by criminals. Instead of appreciating what these volunteers are doing to help protect communities, they are vilified by one section of the media – Stabroek News!

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