

Remarks
Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce (UCCCI)
Annual Dinner
Saturday, July 21, 2012
Corentyne, Berbice

UCCCI President Mr. Krishnand Jaichand,

Other members of the Chamber,

Representatives of the Media

Friends All

I am delighted to join you this evening on the occasion of the Upper Corentyne Chamber of Commerce and Industry's annual dinner. I understand that the Chamber and the U.S. Embassy have a special relationship that dates back to 2000/2001 when the Chamber was a beneficiary under a USAID-funded Guyana Economic Opportunities (GEO) Project to build the capacity of regional Chambers of Commerce.

We also came together a year ago to celebrate and announce the awarding of a US\$28,000 grant to the UCCCI to help address two issues of major concern in Region 6: underage sexual activities among school

children; and the lack of appropriate systems for the effective management and operation of No. 63 Beach as a primary tourist destination in Berbice.

UCCCI was also selected from among 20 civil society organizations, following a highly competitive process, to participate in USAID's Civil Society Enhancement Initiative (CSEI). This initiative provided support to raise the visibility of civil society organizations through their participation in decision making processes at the national, regional, and community levels. As all these projects reflect, we firmly believe the Upper Corentyne Chamber has done an excellent job as a civil society organization – and we look forward to continued cooperation in the future.

I welcome this opportunity to share some perspectives on the important relationship between Guyana and the United States. Since my arrival in Guyana last year, my Embassy team has been working with the Government and people of Guyana to help build a more prosperous, secure, healthy and democratic future for Guyana. So let me take a few

minutes to share with you my country's vision for how we can forge a multifaceted partnership for the 21st century.

Promoting Prosperity

The United States of America and Guyana have a dynamic and rapidly evolving economic relationship. In 2011, Guyana traded more with the United States than with any other country in the world. Guyana exported over 85 billion Guyanese dollars worth of goods to the United States, while importing over 73 billion Guyanese dollars worth of goods from the United States. Many Guyanese products enjoy duty-free access to the U.S. market under the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act, which has been extended to 2020.

As many of you are aware, the United States has been working strategically with local businesses to open up new export and business opportunities for goods and services in non-traditional agriculture, eco-tourism, wood products, and aquaculture through USAID's Guyana Trade and Investment Support program. GTIS has helped farmers make better use of technology such as greenhouse farming and drip irrigation

to increase agricultural production, while linking them with export markets.

We have also worked with local partners to expand and improve the quality of Guyana's eco-tourism, helping build markets for bird watching and sport fishing enthusiasts. The exponential growth in eco-tourism generated by this partnership is providing employment and incomes for indigenous communities and others in the tourism sector. Guyana is clearly emerging as an attractive eco-tourism destination, and we will continue to work closely with government and private partners to develop these markets.

With oil and gas exploration continuing just offshore, the U.S. is working with a host of Government of Guyana ministries and agencies through our Energy Governance Capacity Initiative (EGCI) to support sound management of Guyana's natural resources to maximize development gains for the country.

Guyana is emerging as an increasingly attractive location for U.S. investment due to its proximity and linguistic similarities to the U.S. It

is often said that there are nearly as many Guyanese living in the United States as there are in Guyana. The presence of a large and vibrant Guyanese population in the U.S., many of whom have started their own businesses, creates some intriguing and largely untapped opportunities for new trade and investment links between our nations. The United States recognizes the benefits of bringing entrepreneurs together across borders and has developed some new avenues to encourage people in the Guyanese Diaspora to invest in and collaborate with entrepreneurs in Guyana. The Caribbean IDEA Marketplace, launched by Secretary of State Clinton last year, is promoting collaboration between local entrepreneurs and members of the Caribbean Diaspora to create jobs and stimulate investment. It offers Diaspora communities access to capital and technical assistance to help them get started if they are committed to invest in the country of origin.

While we are working hard to do what we can to expand trade and investment and promote prosperity in Guyana, we would also like to recognize and commend the key role that civil society organizations

such as the UCCCI are playing within your communities. As a private sector organization, the UCCCI is well situated to help bridge political gaps and advocate for needed policy changes and resources. I understand that the Chamber has, over the years, been an effective advocate for this region, lobbying successfully for: rural electricity; the establishment of a Town Council and a Fire Service; adoption of the name Corriverton; the establishment of Guyana/Suriname ferry service; and a reduction in the toll charge of the Berbice River Bridge. We applaud this citizen activism and encourage the Chamber members to continue your outstanding work to promote economic growth and development in Region 6. We share your vision of a blossoming private sector in the Upper Corentyne and welcome continued collaboration.

Strengthening Citizens Security

Ensuring the safety of our people is the highest priority for all governments. Given the transnational nature of criminal activity today, we can only achieve this by working together and by adopting a comprehensive approach. Throughout the Caribbean region,

governments are facing a common challenge to create adequate opportunities for young people and thereby limit the appeal of ‘fast-money’ criminal activity that can lead to violence and insecurity.

Through President Obama’s Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), our nations are taking just such a comprehensive, long-term approach to reduce illicit narcotics trafficking, increase public safety and security, promote social justice, and provide job skills for at-risk youth.

To this end, we are working with Guyana to strengthen maritime interdiction capabilities, professionalize law enforcement agencies, and reform juvenile justice sectors. We are providing the Guyana Defense Force with three patrol vessels and advanced communications equipment to boost its capability to carry out maritime anti-trafficking operations more effectively.

But we want to do more than deal with the consequences of crime, we want to tackle it at the root. The SKYE project – Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment – by expanding education, building skills, and identifying employment prospects for at-risk youth in

Guyana, seeks to do just that. This five-year project also will provide targeted alternative sentencing, work-readiness training, and livelihood coaching activities for 805 youths in regions 4, 6, 9, and 10. For this to be successful, however, the active participation of the private sector is essential in providing opportunities for employment for youths who have successfully completed the program. We hope you will join us to make this a success.

It was this kind of collaboration that made possible a model collaborative effort among the Government of Guyana, the Chamber, and the U.S.-based organization, Zara – the Dream Makers, to undertake a project to provide technology and training to boost citizen security. A computer lab was commissioned at the Felix Austin College in Berbice to facilitate in-service training for police officers and build capability within the force in the area of information technology to assist in combating crime. The Zara Computer Center will also serve to facilitate community programs and youth clubs that can help build a stronger community. Business leaders can also strengthen Guyana’s economy

and security by promoting transparency and fair play and preventing good businesses from competing with those that use illicit financing from money laundering or narcotics trafficking.

Guyana Shines: Protecting the Environment

I am very pleased to see that the Chamber of Commerce has also spearheaded massive clean-up campaigns in Region 6 to give your community a remarkable facelift. As you may know, our Embassy – together with several of the other diplomatic missions and civil society organizations – has been actively involved in a project known as *Guyana Shines* that seeks to stimulate greater civic responsibility and action and promote education to help clean up the streets and restore Guyana’s natural beauty. Through *Guyana Shines*, we have reached out to schools to increase awareness among Guyana’s youth of the harmful effects of littering and pollution. We are encouraging individuals to take responsibility and make environmentally friendly decisions in their own lives and communities. And, armed with garbage bags, gloves, and determination, we also worked together with local groups – youths,

schools, churches, and businesses – to begin to clean up some neighborhoods and make them shine. We are delighted that the Government has launched its own complementary initiative, “Pick it Up Guyana,” and has announced plans to strengthen enforcement against polluters and litterbugs. We believe that working together, individuals, schools, businesses, churches, and civic organizations can make a difference and set an example for others in their community. In fact, I would love to see members of all political parties and all faith groups join with us in a future clean-up. Cleaning up Guyana is something around which that all parties should be able to come together in the national interest. We hope that the Upper Corentyne area will continue to set an example of how to maintain a clean community and continue to make Guyana shine.

Enhancing Social Justice

Both the UCCCI and the U.S. Embassy have undertaken an array of work to promote human rights and protect the health and well-being of the people of Guyana. I understand that the Chamber has distributed

brochures to at-risk groups for early sex prevention, and I applaud this civic activism. I have also heard of your successful blood drives to address the national shortage of blood supply. Our Embassy has similarly organized blood drives to meet urgent health needs in Guyana.

To support Guyana's efforts to advance social justice, the U.S. Embassy has worked alongside the Government of Guyana and local civil society organizations to build awareness about modern day slavery -- trafficking in persons or TIP – a global issue that we must all work together to combat. In February and May, our Embassy organized training and workshops to enhance the ability of those working on the frontlines to identify and react to TIP cases. We welcome the Government's efforts to build awareness of the problem and protect victims. We are hopeful that Guyana's law enforcement and judicial system will take steps to investigate and prosecute traffickers who are benefiting from this form of modern day slavery.

The United States has also been active in working to combat domestic violence and promote female empowerment. We are committed to leading by example and working with the Government of Guyana and other organizations to help address this tragic issue. Last year our Embassy participated in the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign.” USAID has supported civil society organizations to address domestic violence activities by training local officials to deal with domestic violence and by encouraging implementation of domestic violence court protocols. We have also supported improved counseling services for victims and abusers, and programs to strengthen victims’ understanding of their rights. Here in Region 6, I recently had the pleasure of launching the Berbice Male Action Network (BeMAN) at #68 Village – a dedicated group of men active in spreading a message against violence in the heart of the local community. We also participated in the WITNESS Project – a grassroots campaign to spread awareness on domestic violence and make the point visually and powerfully that children are the most vulnerable and impressionable witnesses to violence. We look forward

to continued cooperation with the government, civil society, the private sector, and the public on tackling these critical social issues.

Strengthening Democracy

A longstanding focus of the United States in our relations with Guyana has been democracy and governance. As I noted at the time of the elections, the so-called new dispensation offers Guyana a historic opportunity to take strides toward genuine national unity that will be indispensable if Guyana is to make the economic and social advances that the people of Guyana wish to see. Achieving such unity will not come without setbacks and challenges, such as we have seen in the tragic events of this past week in Linden.

I wish to reiterate our sadness over the tragic and unnecessary loss of life in Linden. While the issue of electricity rates and the broader economic future of Linden can and should be debated, no one should lose their life from participation in a peaceful protest. We welcome the efforts being made to establish a Commission of Inquiry, and hope that

the results of such a Commission will be used to prevent future occurrences of excessive use of force by security forces.

I do think it is important to acknowledge the significant step to unity and national progress represented by the civic response to the recent controversial Chronicle editorial of July 2nd. I was very pleased to see that the Catholic Church, other civil society groups, and concerned citizens raised their voices to make clear that such tired, racial stereotyping is unacceptable in a modern, dynamic, multi-racial Guyana. The chorus of condemnation demonstrated quite dramatically that the people of Guyana have had enough of racial politics; they want their leaders to be focused on issues that affect their lives: employment, education, transparency, crime, and the environment. Again, I commend all who made their voice heard, and hope that those who would seek to sow the seeds of racial division will take heed.

I am also very encouraged by the reinvigoration of the National Assembly and its role as a co-equal branch of democratic government with the executive and the judiciary. There is still much to do to build the capacity and independence of the Assembly so it can meet its

constitutional obligations more effectively and expand public awareness of its debates and decisions.

Finally, I think that many of the issues and challenges we have discussed, whether keeping cities clean or promoting economic growth in diverse communities, make clear the glaring need for local government elections. All parties have committed themselves to such elections, and it is time for Guyana to complete the preparatory legislation and give people the accountable, elected local officials they can turn to for action in their communities. This would truly be democracy in action, and it would speed Guyana's development, support social welfare, and enhance public security.

Conclusion: Key Role of the Business Community

In all of the areas I have discussed, the business community, through the Chamber, has a key role to play. Your advocacy for an open and transparent business climate can help ensure the efficiency and accountability of government institutions, while boosting long-term growth. Your support for a safe and secure country can reinforce the importance of meeting security challenges in innovative new ways.

Your commitment to a clean country can restore Guyana's beauty and build momentum to clean up the country. Your support for social change can make a difference in preventing trafficking in persons and domestic violence. And, your support for responsive issue-oriented political discourse and local government elections can greatly strengthen the political environment, ensure accountability, and promote greater social inclusion.

The United States looks forward to deepening our dialogue with the Chamber and the broader business community to advance our 21st century partnership. While there are many challenges ahead, this is an exciting time to be in Guyana. I truly believe the future for Guyana is very bright if the Government and people keep their focus on the future, move beyond the past, and come together to build this dynamic and bountiful country.

Thank you.