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REMARKS OF  
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MLK ESSAY CONTEST PRESENTATION CEREMONY

JANUARY 17, 2012

**MLK Essay Contest**

- Yesterday, people across the United States celebrated a national holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King, more than any other American, led the charge to overcome racial divisions and bind our nation together as one people. As a leader of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's, his non-violent approach to conflict resolution had a profound impact for the better on the United States.
- His values, his ideals, and his courage still stand as a beacon of hope not only for Americans, but for citizens of all nations who believe in justice and equality.
- Today, to mark this occasion in Guyana, we are able to celebrate the U.S. Embassy's first annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Contest with impressive participants from four schools around the country. In coming together this evening, we are able to recall the life and work of Dr. King and honor his memory by recommitting ourselves to taking action in our lives to advance the ideals for which he worked and ultimately gave his life.
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is perhaps best remembered for what he said on a hot August day in 1963 when he traveled to Washington, DC and, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial before 250,000 people, urged his fellow Americans to rise up and live out the true meaning of our creed: that all men are created equal.

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- But what we often overlook about Dr. King as we move further in time from the events that shaped his life, was the extraordinary personal courage, the family sacrifices, the hours planning marches and protests, the arrests, the threats to his life and home that marked his life.
- Dr. King was not simply a great and inspiring orator and powerful writer; he was a man who was willing to work tirelessly to help others and to bring justice to all Americans. He led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott that went on for over a year before the city agreed to end segregation on the city buses. He supported the sit-in protests of young black college students trying to break down segregation at restaurants and stores, and was arrested for his efforts. He marched in Birmingham to highlight to the world the poor working conditions faced by many African-Americans, and was again arrested. He led the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom to further highlight the gap between our nations' ideals and the day to day experience of African Americans. He launched the Poor People's campaign in 1967 to focus national attention on poverty and push for an economic bill of rights. To the end, he put the cause of the poorest and those suffering discrimination above his health and his safety.
- When you put all this together, you see a common thread with the essays that our essay contest participants have written: a recognition that changing the world for the better and overcoming hatred and division begins with each of us -- with what we do and how we act toward others.
- That is why I was so gratified to see the creative thinking of the young Guyanese students in the essays we received.
- The contest this year was open to students, ages 12 to 16 in public and private schools throughout Guyana. Students were invited to write an essay on Dr. Martin Luther King's call for a "genuine revolution of values" through which our loyalties would become "ecumenical rather

than sectional” – meaning they would seek unity among differing groups rather than highlighting differences. Participants were asked to discuss how young people in Guyana can contribute to the advancement of Dr. King’s “revolution of values” that reflects unconditional love for all people regardless of tribe, race, class, or creed, and how they can help make this spirit “the order of the day” in their community and country.

- I would like to recognize all of the participants in this year's competition. Thank you for taking the time to think about where we stand in today's world, the challenges we continue to face, and to reflect upon and write about Dr. King's teachings to develop your own ideas about what we all can and need to do to move ever closer to Dr. King's vision of a revolution of values.
- Dr. King lived and died long before any of our young writers were born. While they may never have heard him in person, their presentations showed that they have a clear understanding of his message and, more importantly, they understand that message within their own experiences and were able to apply the message to their personal circumstances.
- For example, Sheena Chin in her essay calls attention to the vital role that the young people of Guyana can play, whether at home, in school, in clubs, in religious organizations, or in volunteer efforts to lead the way to a revolution of values. To achieve a more peaceful, united world, she calls for all of us to “take the opportunity to learn more about the different cultures” so we can “appreciate others more.”
- Kenesha Adams, in her thoughtful essay, focuses on the important role of education in overcoming division and misunderstanding. She argues that Dr. King’s dream can be advanced by educating young people about different people and their cultures. She also highlights commonalities among the teachings of major religious groups in promoting values of love for others, generosity, and kindness.

- Sondra Low likewise identifies creative ways to build awareness of the richness of the many cultures that make up Guyana, from “bottom house meetings” and clubs to plays and performances. She worries that modern technology can often alienate people from each other, and calls for more activities where people interact directly with each other.
- In her essay, Manouska Vyfhuis reflected on the life and work of Dr. King, and the impact he had during his lifetime. She effectively highlights the many struggles he faced, the persistence with which he pursued his dream, and the accomplishments he attained.
- Thank you Manouska Sheena, Sondra, and Kenesha for participating and sharing your thoughts with us.
- Thank you, parents and teachers for the support you gave your children and students. Thanks also to the officials of the Ministry of Education for facilitating this project. We look forward to collaborating with all of you in the future to continue promoting peace and harmony in our respective communities.
- I believe that by honoring Dr. King, we honor all people who continue to stand up for peace, freedom, equality, and justice. These universal values are values the United States shares with Guyana, and values we are pleased our participants were able to evoke so well in their essays.