

Dear Editor,

Please allow me a response to Mr. Vincent Alexander's recent tirade against me that was carried in an editorial of the Stabroek News on Sunday May 21, 2023 in which he made several spurious objections to the contents of a letter that I drafted and circulated among members of the African Guyanese cluster of organizations that participated in the Parliamentary process that elected me as their official representative on the Ethnic Relations Commission.

Firstly, Mr. Alexander's claim that the cluster of seven main Afro-Guyanese organizations, that were agreed upon by both major parliamentary parties to which I referred in the letter; is a figment of my mind, has no standing and is not a real group; is misleading. He is fully aware that I made a promise to the cluster that once elected I would operate in a consultative manner in representing our issues. When I was sworn in by H.E President Irfaan Ali on March 21, 2023 I immediately called a first meeting of the cluster and requested of them to begin work on a comprehensive document of perceived areas of inequality and discrimination that would be submitted to the ERC and which would serve as the standard to measure the effectiveness of my tenure. The cluster has met at the ERC's boardroom about five times between March 21 to May 21, 2023. Though Mr. Alexander has not come to any meetings, representatives of the coordinating council of IDPADA-G, whether to help or to subvert, have been in attendance. So when Mr. Alexander says that "Khafra has reconstituted the group unilaterally; designated himself as leader...", he exposes his malicious intent to impugn my character and to subvert my efforts not as leader but as the duly elected Afro-Guyanese commissioner on the ERC.

Secondly, Mr. Alexander in his attempt to refute my claim that the government's intervention into the affairs of IDPADA-G was at the request of many of the organizations within IDPADA-G states that "the organizations in the contrived cluster, such as Pan African Movement Guyana, ACDA and ironically IDPADA-G, among others have not invited such intervention". This is another attempt to mislead. The truth is that those organizations, inclusive of the Guyana Rastafari Council, took a step back after major irregularities were observed and it was perceived that the entity was being hijacked by political operatives to be used in the battle between the major political parties. Subsequent to that, almost thirty of the fifty plus organizations of IDPADA-G at that time drafted, signed and submitted a letter of grievances and irregularities to Mr. Alexander requesting a meeting to address their concerns. He failed to address their demands and a subset of that larger group decided to send the letter to the Minister of Culture for his intervention. The Minister's response was to stop the subvention and the rest is as they say, history.

Thirdly, Mr. Alexander asserts that their accusations of ethnic inequality and government discrimination at the UN last year "was not an act of protestation" but that IDPADA-G merely

“reports to these UN mechanisms as is provided for in their modus operandi”, however, it can be construed as an act to make the government look bad and not as any real attempt to have the issues reported on addressed since IDPADA-G has failed to exhaust all available national or local avenues to seek redress. IDPADA-G should know that the UN is an international body that deals with protocol and though it may be inclined to listen, would be hard pressed to do more since they have failed to follow protocol. To date IDPADA-G has not made any attempt to submit to the ERC a report of the perceived inequalities and discrimination that people of African descent in Guyana face. If the ERC fails in its mandate to address those concerns then IDPADA-G would be justified and validated in its recourse to the UN.

The African Guyanese community does not deserve to be held at ransom and used by any political party as a shield in their war against their political opponent. African Guyanese cannot continue to be collateral damage. I, as Rastafari, will not squander the opportunity that has been given to me by the officially recognized representatives of the African Guyanese community to ensure that the members of our community are not discriminated against and that they are provided with an equal share of the rich resources that we have been blessed with as a country. I am encouraged that the government has shown a willingness to engage with the official representatives of the African Guyanese community within a context of mutual respect, trust and confidence and to begin a process to address the perceived needs of the community. Consequently, I will continue to utilize the office of commissioner of African Guyanese to ensure that the community is effectively represented within the context of my mandate.

Yours truly
Ras Khafra
Commissioner
Ethnic Relations Commission