***Government of Guyana Response to the Request of the OHCHR Special Procedures Branch on information in regards to the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation***

***January 31, 2012***

For two decades, the Government of Guyana has worked to ensure that all Guyanese, regardless of their location, gender, or ethnicity, have access to basic resources such as reliable and safe drinking water and sanitation.

The Government continues to adopt legislative and administrative measures including laws, and policies that prohibit any forms of discrimination within Guyana, thus ensuring equality for all.

*This is evident in Article 149 (1) of the Guyana Constitution which states that “Subject to the provisions of this article – (a) no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect: and (b) no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by the virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority.” In addition, Article 149 (2) states that “the expression ‘discriminatory’ means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their parents’ or guardians’ respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed, age, disability, marital status, sex, gender, language, birth or culture whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which other persons of the same or another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not afforded to other persons of the same or another such description.”*

Government has adopted a non-discriminatory policy within all sectors including the water and sanitation sector. This has been made possible through the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) which was formed on May 30th, 2002. Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) was created following the dissolution of the Guyana Water Authority (GUYWA) and the Georgetown Sewerage & Water Commissioners (GS&WC). One of the principal activities of the company is to provide portable water supply to all citizens of Guyana and effectively and efficiently improve water supply services to the poor and the communities in the hinterland regions.

GWI operates under the regulations outlined in the Water & Sewerage Act 2002. The Water and Sewage Act Cap 30:01 specifically states in Art. 5(1) “the Minster shall discharge his functions under the Act in the manner which is best calculated to ensure that (a) the water resources are equitably allocated for the social and economic benefit of Guyana.”

In addition to that, the Act also stipulates in Art. 48 (2) that “the rates to be charged by a public supplier shall not show undue preference for, or unduly discriminate against, any consumer or class of consumers similarly situated provided that different rates may be prescribed for different classes of consumers, by reference to the different areas of supply or different parts of such areas or to any other relevant circumstance.”

Improvements in the supply of, and access to, safe water and sanitation services are critical to achieving the objectives of the Government of Guyana pro-poor pro-growth approach to national development and the reduction of poverty. The Government recognizing the links between water, sanitation and poverty, was successful in garnering support from financial and multi-lateral aid institutions such as DFID, the IADB and the World Bank. From 1993, it has embarked on a reform programme to improve water and sanitation services across Guyana as part of its national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Government has invested significantly with particular attention to poor formerly un-served areas on the coastal belt and in the far hinterland communities which were previously neglected. It was difficult for the hinterland communities to have access to regular and clean water supply due to their isolation and geographic challenges. As a result of this, a new hinterland strategy was developed, which focuses on the use of sustainable energy and appropriate cost effective means to facilitate the provision of safe drinking water for the hinterland communities.

Over the past five years, over G$600M[[1]](#footnote-1) (USD 3 M) was spent on the improvement of water supply in the hinterland communities. There has been significant improvement in hinterland water supply and by 2011 new and improved service and standard of living for more than 20,000 people has been achieved. Evidence of this has been the major decline in infant and child mortality from diarrheal diseases both nationally and in the hinterland communities.

These improvements have been realized through the construction of six new boreholes that were completed in 2011 while two are currently being drilled. Seventeen new photovoltaic systems were successfully installed, and the installation of an additional nine is ongoing, which will see 29 new photovoltaic systems installed in hinterland communities.

In addition to that fourteen elevated storage facilities were also completed in Administrative Regions One, Two, Eight and Nine (where the hinterland communities reside) and by the end of 2011 approximately 50 new wells were drilled, benefitting over 55,000 persons.

Government has thus intensified its efforts to afford all Guyanese equal access to quality water, especially those residing in hinterland areas that were previously marginalized.

The Government of Guyana has invested in excess of G$15B ( USD 75M )in the water sector over the last 12 years and this has resulted in over 80,000 persons gaining access to safe water through the general upgrading of access to water across all the ten administrative regions in Guyana.

In 1991, only 50 per cent of the population had access to safe drinking water which was unreliable and unpredictable in its availability, however, this percentage increased to 86 per cent in 2008, and in November 2011 the Guyana Water Incorporated reported that 98 percent of the population had access to a reliable supply of safe potable water supply.

A squatter regularisation programme was developed in 2001. This programme is design to provide standardized house lots and legal title of land to the occupants. Under this programme 5,529 families received title to their land and property for the first time. Government has invested significantly within those areas to provide these residents with access to safe potable water which they were previously unable to access.

In addition, from 2001-2005 the Ministry of Housing and Water allocated 15,778 house lots in all the ten (10) administrative regions benefitting approx 75,000 persons. Between Y2006-2009 an additional 13,188 house lots were allocated benefitting approximately 65,000 persons. While from 2010-2012 an additional 17,000 house lots are expected to be allocated. Government provides basic social services such as access to potable water within all these new housing schemes to ensure equal access for all.

By the end of 2011 GWI had commissioned seven new water treatment plants at a cost in excess of $5B G ($25 MUSD), which has contributed to the improvement in service and water quality to over 150,000 persons throughout Guyana.

The Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) commenced work on the massive Government of Guyana funded, G$850 Million (USD4.25M) “Coastal 2011 Programme” which involves the construction of five (5) new well stations to boost the service provided to several communities along Guyana’s coastal regions.

In addition to that in 2011 the Linden Water Supply Rehabilitation Programme, (Administrative Region 10), which is jointly funded by the Government of Guyana and the IDB, is expected to be implemented over the next three to five years, from an investment of US$12M. This will see the construction of two new water treatment plants, replacement of transmission and distribution mains, and installation of district metered areas within the region.

The Government of Guyana has also interceded on the behalf of pensioners, by subsidising the cost of water to this group, and the number of beneficiaries has increased from a total of 20,000 in 2005, to nearly 50,000 persons.

Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) has commenced a massive customer outreach programme titled “GWI Community Connect”. This programme aims to enhance GWI’s customer relations and foster customers’ appreciation for the services provided by the Water Utility company.

The programme will involve GWI teams being placed at strategic locations within communities across Guyana to provide all the services customers usually enjoy at the Company’s commercial offices.

At “GWI Community Connect”, customers who are unable to visit GWI’s customer services offices will have an opportunity meet with a GWI team and have their billing queries and complaints remedied. Customers can also make bill payments at all of the “connect” locations. Most importantly, customers will have an opportunity to clearly understand GWI’s daily operations and become active participants in GWI’s service and conservation awareness campaigns through interaction with GWI officials.

GWI has managed to improve its service delivery and levels of service to all consumers through systems improvements and capital works. The Operations and Asset Development Teams vigorous prepared and executed numerous projects aimed at improving transmission and distribution systems and expanding services to previously un-served communities.

In regards to sanitation in particular solid waste disposal, only parts of the capital city, Georgetown, is connected to a sewerage system. The rest of the city and the country uses individual septic tanks and in isolated areas, pit latrines. In all the new housing schemes mentioned previously, all houses must install septic tanks. In Amerindian and hinterland communities, pit latrines are used and schools have introduced the use of septic tanks in large communities.

As Government continues its expansion within the water and sanitation sector, its approach has always been to adopt a non discriminatory policy and gender equality to ensure all persons living in Guyana are entitled to safe drinking water and sanitation. As a result of this, there are no known cases of stigmatization of individuals, groups of persons or gender discrimination within our water and sanitation sector.

1. $200 Guyana dollars is equivalent to $1 USD [↑](#footnote-ref-1)