

## **Presentation to the National Assembly on the 2017 budget.**

Mr Speaker, presentation of three budgets in just over one and a half years is something any government would be proud of. It is an indicator of a government on the move vigorously pursuing the interests of the citizenry. In this regard, congratulations to the Honourable Minister of Finance are in order.

Mr Speaker, budget 2017 among other things gives life to the vision of our President with respect to the concept of One Nation. It is the first budget in a very long time which speaks in such profound terms to the realisation of the connecting of Guyana's hinterland to its coastland.

The many planned interventions in the areas of: infrastructural development, food security, renewable energy, sustainable ecotourism development, security, communication, education and health care delivery among others; and the billions of dollars budgeted for the accomplishment of these planned interventions tell the story of the importance of our hinterland and indigenous communities and peoples to the process of national development.

Building a diversified green economy: Delivering the good life to all Guyanese is an appropriate theme for our 2017 budget. The several clean renewable energy projects such as the proposed solar farm in Mabaruma set the tone for our National energy programme for the future. The Minister of Finance in his budget speech outlined the billions of dollars in savings which will be realised from changing our street lights from energy inefficient bulbs to energy efficient Light emitting Diodes (LED) lights. The savings from the consumption of heavy diesel fuel to power these existing lights can now be channelled into other developmental projects. The projected energy generation from the Mabaruma solar farm will see the new town benefiting from an additional seventeen hours of electricity per day. The 264 million dollars 400 kilowatt solar farm is indeed an exciting development.

Former Members of Parliament from Region One who advocated for additional hours of electricity per day to Mabaruma and the residents of the town must now be happy.

Mr Speaker, the Guyanese citizens understand that the Peoples Progressive Party will oppose the budget. That is because the Guyanese citizens understand that the Peoples Progressive Party is in opposition and not government, a fact that seems to escape the attention of the honourable members on the other side of the isle. This is perhaps why they continue to repeat their falsities for as long and as often as it takes to believe them as in the case of the repeated untruth about CSOs being fired. The records show differently and we have proven the PPP's claim as absolutely false over and over again.

Undertaking the first phase of the Linden to Lethem road complimented by a bridge across the Essequibo River at Kurupukari demonstrates the will of a government intent upon the realisation of the type of development geared to lift the quality of life of all Guyanese and capitalise upon the opportunities of our continental geo-space.

Mr Speaker, after twenty three long years of waiting, the residents of Port Kaituma in Region One must be breathing a sigh of relief because budget 2017 will finally address their road. Hinterland infrastructure is clearly important to our government. Issano, Karrau, Buck Hall, Karasabai, Monkey Mountain, Aishalton and Shea in Regions 7,8 and 9 will all benefit from major road improvement.

Rehabilitation of twelve hinterland airstrips, several hinterland wharves and ocean going vessels are interventions which are all geared to lift the quality of life of our hinterland and indigenous peoples. These measures are supportive of the countless other initiatives provided for in this very impressive budget in the areas of food and water security, education and health care delivery and youth development.

Our hinterland communities will benefit from some of the 2.5 billion dollars allocated for Technical Vocational Education and Training. This as part of an integrated network of training interventions targeting our youth will compliment the other programmes such as: The Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training (YEST), Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED), Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) platform and our Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS).

The practical instruction centres (PICs) in Mabaruma, Bartica, Lethem and Mahdia will be rehabilitated and the Bina Hill Institute of Learning will receive support to the tune of 111 million dollars even as our hinterland school children benefit from the 90 million dollars school uniform support programme. There is also the expansion of the Hinterland Scholarship Programme in 2017.

Mr Speaker, our young people are guaranteed opportunities to adequately prepare themselves for the world of opportunities which are coming their way. Our President speaks of an education nation. These planned interventions take into account the training needs of our young people and the human resources requirements of our investors as well as the ambitions of our young potential entrepreneurs themselves.

Open access to information in the hinterland will also be boosted. Guyana will soon boast of an additional four hinterland community radio stations. These apart from providing employment opportunities and support to the existing Radio Piwomak, Radio Lethem and Radio Mabaruma, will lend to the objectives of providing information, opportunities for the preservation and promotion of indigenous cultures and languages and providing opportunities for the promotion of local talent and products.

As a ministry we have our work cut out for us. Ours is the responsibility for the administration of the Amerindian Act. Ours is the responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana.

In furtherance of the work which we are doing and must continue to do, we must ensure that the best interest of our Indigenous Peoples guides us and that, their Villages and Communities receive the goods and services to which they are entitled in a timely and qualitative manner.

It is with this in mind that, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will continue its pursuit of the Amerindian Land Titling Project and the funding of developmental projects in all of our Villages and communities. Sir, I am pleased to report that we have managed to secure a two extension to the Amerindian Land Titling Project to allow for completion of the work which we must do.

Further, Mr Speaker, we will commence the construction of the dormitory for tertiary students at Liliendaal. We believe that, this measure will ensure the increased number of Indigenous youth who will pursue higher education. We understand the challenges of finding lodging in the City or on the Coast land and the financial challenges as well which confront our Indigenous youth in the pursuit of

higher education. The new dormitory will address these challenges and make possible for many Indigenous youth the attainment of tertiary qualification.

We intend to address the quality of the facilities available to our Indigenous Guyanese citizens who must travel to the city and temporarily reside at the hostel on Princess Street. These brothers and sisters when away from their home for reasons related to employment and sickness among others, deserve better. This budget provides for the improvement of the dining hall as the first among several interventions planned for the future. The long term projections with respect to the hostel are intended to make it a home away from home.

Mr Speaker, I know only too well that, the Opposition has suggested and will continue to suggest to whomever will listen that, this budget does not have, as Honourable Yvonne Pearson put it: “economic activity for Indigenous Peoples”. I understand that that position is rooted in the inability of the Honourable Member to comprehend all of what is contained in the budget and her and her Party’s preference for hand-outs to be given as a form of control over Indigenous Peoples.

This coalition government promised to move away from the inherited practice of our predecessors to seek to control people by first starving them of opportunities and then offering them hand-outs as a form of induced servitude.

We believe instead in the principle of self-determination of our Indigenous Peoples. This is why the Ministry of Public Infrastructure will build roads, bridges, airstrips and wharves to stimulate and foster economic activity. This is why our young people who, having been trained in specific skills areas will be motivated to create their own opportunities making full use of the infrastructure to make simple their operations.

Infrastructure development brings jobs with it and it leaves in its wake enormous opportunities for both the establishment and expansion of businesses.

The Ministry is working in partnership with several organisations such as Conservation International, Remote Area Medical and The United Nations Development Programme among others at the moment. Our shared mission is to lift the capacity of our Indigenous population in every conceivable area. We are working to bring community development projects to boost food security, enhance health care delivery, expand sustainable economic ventures in ecotourism and agriculture among several areas.

Our Indigenous Peoples have expressed a preference for such partnerships and outcomes as against hand-outs. All of the outcomes of the partnership engagements will create jobs; all of them will lift the quality of life of the hinterland and Indigenous Peoples of Guyana with minimal reliance on the tax dollars and burden on the National Budget.

Mr Speaker, the claims of the opposition regarding no provision for the Ten Point Plan as adumbrated by the President is lame at best. The plan was presented to the National Assembly of Indigenous Peoples – the National Tshaos’ Council. There it was considered and in principle approved along with some recommendations being submitted.

Thus far the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services has come into being, draft terms of reference for the Lands Commission are being discussed. Mr Speaker any person who has the

capacity to read and comprehend will tell you that the objectives of the Hinterland Education Support Programme are consistently being achieved. This budget directly addresses the projected outcome of the Hinterland Infrastructure Extension Programme; the hundreds of millions of dollars allocated in the budget tell the story which begs to be read by Honourable Pearson. The budget also frontally addresses the Hinterland Energy Development Programme of the government of Guyana. One only has to look at the proposed solar farm for Mabaruma among the other provisions and tax concessions in this regard. Additionally Mr Speaker, the budget lays the foundation for all of the other five points of the Ten Point Plan to come alive. Rome was not built in a day. Guyana unlike Rome has to be remodelled, cleaned up and then rebuilt. Mr Speaker, I believe that in the circumstances, we are doing a remarkably good job of fulfilling our commitments to our citizens and lifting the quality of life in Guyana. This is what we are committed to; this is what we will not be distracted from accomplishing.

Mr Speaker, careful examination of this 2017 budget will reveal that great care was taken to ensure that duplication of expenditure by way of multiple undertaking of a similar nature by more than one ministry or agency was at all cost avoided.

No longer will citizens see two or more ministries or state agencies spending their hard earned tax dollars to do the same thing. One may recall Mr Speaker, that, as recent as October 2014 the NDIA and the New GMC both recorded the same expenditure of the sum of 111.2 million dollars to do the same thing. I refer to the Kaieteur News report of June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016 on the forensic audit findings into the GMC.

This is the era of accountability and transparency. The mistakes of the past has served and will continue to be for us lessons which make us better stewards of the ship of state and guardians of the rights and best interests of the people of Guyana.

We must demonstrate maturity. We must walk away from the desire to behave as Honourable Pauline Sukhai did in this House yesterday. We must never again allow any citizen to be assaulted at the urging of members of the executive like Mr John Adams of Aishalton was. I urge, therefore, that, my colleagues of the opposition follow me to the top of the mountain so that we could look down upon the beautiful savannahs below while breathing the fresh clean air of green Guyana.

Mr Speaker, this is a rounded budget which contains programmes and measures geared to guarantee development within the context of its theme and in the best interest of all Guyanese. I, therefore, recommend its passage and accordingly call on all members of the house to offer full support in this regard.

Sydney Allicock, M.S, M.P  
Vice President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.  
Budget 2017.  
Thursday 08<sup>th</sup> December, 2016.