

PRESS RELEASE

GUYANA POLICY FORUM SUBMITS CIVIC SELECTION FOR EITI TO MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Guyana Policy Forum has submitted to the Ministry of Natural Resources the list of names of persons who will comprise the interim civic component of the tri-partite mechanism intended to manage the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Along with endorsing the civic list, the Forum selected an interim Chair and Steering Committee for the Forum. These decisions were taken at a Forum Meeting held at the Guyana Human Rights Centre with representatives of seventeen members of the Forum.

The Guyana Policy Forum had accepted an invitation from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to identify civic members for the tri-partite committee. Initially, the civic component was assigned seven (7) members, the industry sector five (5) and the Government sector five (5), although these numbers have to be finally confirmed by the MNR. The tri-partite committee has been in the process of formation since last November.

Achieving adequate and balanced representation of the entire civic sector comprising community-based, cultural, disabilities, indigenous, professional, religious, trade unions, women, youth, etcetera is a major undertaking. The EITI encompasses a unique governance challenge in assigning equal power to all three component parts of the tri-partite committee, replacing the arrangement in which the government traditionally always had the last say in multi-sectoral committees. In the context of Guyana, where governance mechanisms are rudimentary and polarized, success with the new formula in the EITI context opens possibilities for its wider application.

Recognizing the need for care the Forum, therefore, adopted a two-stage exercise: initially creating an interim component comprising individuals charged with developing democratic and financial probity criteria. Following determination of the criteria and a period in which organizations desirous of serving in the tri-partite committee would have an opportunity, if needed, to get themselves in order, a substantive civic team will be formed.

It is self-evident that civic bodies responsible for managing a process demanding transparency from industrial and State bodies active in the extractive industries must themselves be compliant with minimum democratic and financial standards.

Along with the group of seven (7) members of the civic component, five alternates will attend and have a voice but not a vote at EITI meetings. The individuals selected were deemed collectively to possess the range of skills, qualities and experience to contribute to establishing the EITI in Guyana.

Names submitted for the civic component will be announced by the Ministry of Natural Resources along with those from the Government and industry sectors of the tri-partite committee.

With respect to the structure of the Guyana Policy Forum, the Meeting reviewed its work in the two thematic areas: national preparation for COP21 and promoting the EITI process over the six months of its existence.

This review led to the following decisions:

- The Guyana Policy Forum will act as an advocacy network whose collective voice will support, at the request of member organizations, issues which require national attention. In other words, the Forum does not currently see itself as initiating new areas of action in which member organizations are not already engaged.
- In terms of lessons learnt from the first six months it was agreed that the constructive relations developed with the Ministry of Natural Resources reinforced the importance of constructive inter-sectoral cooperation. Secondly, the productive engagement between the Policy Forum and the Norwegian delegation which visited Guyana recently was considered to be a formula which should be explored for wider application. .
- Until such time as the Guyana Policy Forum develops a formalized management structure of its own, the Meeting elected a Chair and a three-person interim Steering Committee. For the interim period the Forum will be administered through the offices of the GHRA in the Guyana Human Rights Centre.
- Communication with ordinary members of organizations and with the public at large is a constant challenge which the Forum needs to address. This problem is aggravated by two factors: firstly, the extent to which political issues are obscured (and dominated) by technical language and the use of multiple acronyms. This effectively exclude participation of ordinary citizens from important debates. Secondly, engaging the attention of the media in an era in which the terms 'news' and 'sensational' are seen as virtually identical, is an additional challenge.

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