

United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Online consultation with States:

“Civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society”

Responses for the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

1. What innovative practices did authorities in your state adopt to facilitate civil society’s input to decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis, including through online channels?

- *Integrating CSOs in the emergency response initiative*
- *PAHO/WHO pilot initiative “Strengthening Civil Society Engagements in the COVID-19 Response*
- *Private Sector involvement on the National COVID-19 Taskforce headed by the Prime Minister of Guyana*
- *Civil society organizations’ presence on the Civil Defense Commission and further collaboration to dispatch COVID relief measures – amassing, storing, and distributing food hampers, personal protective equipment (sanitizing supplies, masks, etc.) to communities,*

2. Are there innovative practices that authorities in your country used to enable safe and inclusive online participation, which encourages a diversity of participation, with a particular emphasis on underrepresented parts of civil society?

The Minister of Education hosted several virtual meetings using popular online platforms to engage thousands of parents on the arrangements and preparations being made to reopen schools, all in the best interest of all children in Guyana.

Further, the Minister of Education also facilitated a series of virtual meetings with teachers to share information about vaccination and the measures/guidelines being put in place to protect both teachers and students upon the reopening of schools.

The Government of Guyana also expended resources to retrofit steel containers, transforming them into fully equipped virtual courtrooms. These virtual courtrooms are housed at prison facilities and allow for prisoners’ rights to trials to be protected, whilst also curtailing the spread of COVID-19. Courts were also equipped with the necessary ICT resources.

3. Do you have examples of good practice in including civil society in designing and implementing strategies to respond to the pandemic?

From April to May 2020, the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) and the United Republican Party (URP), during the recount of the March 2020 elections, worked with faith-based organisations, the business community and community and village leaders to coordinate volunteers, who were mainly women in rural and interior communities. Volunteers contributed by sewing cloth masks and distributing sustenance hampers to the most vulnerable and under-resourced. Over two hundred thousand (200,000) cloth masks and over one hundred thousand (100,000) food essential hampers were distributed throughout the country to the most vulnerable communities.

Handbills encouraging constant sanitisation and mask-wearing were also distributed.

4. Do you have examples of innovative steps taken to minimise the impact of measures imposed during the pandemic, including emergency measures, on the free and safe functioning of civil society and on public freedoms (of expression, access to information, assembly, and association) as well as on the protection of personal data and privacy?

The Government of Guyana remained committed to protecting fundamental human rights and freedoms of expression, assembly and association to safe extents, in keeping with information available about COVID-19 at the time. Private sector companies such as restaurants and bars were allowed to function at reduced capacity in outdoor settings.

Further, faith-based organisations were allowed to accommodate members at identified capacities. The relationships between many faith-based organisations (FBO) and the Government were actively strengthened, which was evident in the FBOs offers to have their places of worship utilized as vaccination sites.

The Ministry of Health adopted stringent public information guidelines which allowed for daily updates about COVID-19 with extensive amounts of well disaggregated and comprehensible information. These updates continue to be shared daily to complement other parallel public COVID-19 information campaigns.

5. Did authorities in your state implement any innovative measures to protect and facilitate civil society access to resources in the COVID-19 context?

The Government of Guyana introduced new innovative measures and enhanced existing measures which already facilitated civil society access to resources. These measures included:

- *Continued financial support to charities and non-governmental organisations functioning within various sectors.*
- *Value Added Tax (VAT) exemptions for drugs and medical supplies.*

- *Ministry of Amerindian Affairs' economic investment fund to over two hundred (200) Amerindian communities.*
- *Ministry of Education's "Because We Care" cash grant programme and uniform vouchers for children registered in all public and private schools.*
- *Etc.*

6. Has your state identified any good practices to identify, and protect civil society from, online intimidation and attacks (e.g. online threats, harassment, organized smear campaigns etc.)?

- *Enforcement of the Cybercrimes Act*
- *Utilization of available complaints mechanisms within constitutional rights bodies (such as the Ethnic Relations Commission, the Women and Gender Equality Commission, etc.)*