

Submission by Red Thread and Help & Shelter on the issue of Corporal Punishment in the Draft Education Bill under consideration by the Education Task Force

Remove Corporal Punishment from Guyana's Schools

In December 2006, a large number of persons, whose names appear in Annex A, endorsed a letter to the Members of Parliament calling for the abolition of corporal punishment in Guyana's schools.

This submission reflects the views expressed in that letter.

1. The Ministry of Education has embarked on reform of education legislation and as part of that process the Education Task Force has circulated a draft Education Bill, section 52 of which deals with corporal punishment.
2. This section is apparently intended to replace Education Code Regulations 93 and 94, which at present govern corporal punishment.
3. We believe that the inclusion of these sections is a retrogressive step for Guyana. The beating of children in Guyana's schools is an abuse of the power of adults over children. Guyana has to overcome a history of institutional violence being used - during slavery, indentureship and colonialism - to force submission and to entrench relations of superiority and inferiority.
4. Corporal punishment attacks the child's body and not the problem itself. It is useless if the goal is to correct a particular behaviour.
5. The rising levels of violence in our society are indicative of the failure of people to resolve conflicts and antisocial behaviour at every level. The physical abuse of children that masquerades as corporal punishment in our homes, schools and other institutions is an important contributing factor as it teaches from a very young age that violence is an acceptable way to solve or correct problems and that people in authority have the right to impose their will or rules on those in their care through the use of physical force.
6. Research indicates that persons administering corporal punishment obtain satisfaction from doing so while at the same time communicating fear, hatred and disrespect.
7. The existing Ministry of Education guidelines on corporal punishment are not followed and the requirements in the draft Bill are similarly unlikely to be followed. The 2005 UNICEF/Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security/Red Thread Report "Voices of Children: Experiences with Violence" states:

"The 2002 Ministry of Education guidelines state that corporal punishment of children should not be used by class teachers, but only by the Head Teacher in extreme cases. However, during this survey, children reported that corporal punishment is administered more often by teachers in the classroom than by the heads in Schools."

The report identifies not doing school work well as among the six most common reasons for the administration of corporal punishment in schools. 20% of children interviewed said that they received corporal punishment for such things as not finishing work, not writing fast enough, and spelling words incorrectly. This indicates that corporal punishment is not only being used as a means of imposing discipline but to penalise children whose only 'crime' is performing below expectations in academic subjects. This group will include children who may be dyslexic, abused, or have mild physical disabilities.

8. The use of corporal punishment in this way is all the more intolerable because by creating a psychological association between physical punishment and school work, it encourages children who are unable to satisfy their teachers to believe themselves failures and this no doubt contributes significantly to the drop out rate.

The 2005 report also states that:

"Children often mentioned being physically and emotionally hurt by the use of corporal punishment and even described being 'beaten bad' by their teachers [resulting in] swelling of hands so that it was difficult to write, leaving permanent marks on their skin, leaving them so humiliated that they could not concentrate on their work, or leaving them too afraid to ask for help."

9. We all know of the incidents reported in the media of school children being subjected to brutal physical violence in the classroom by their teachers. In some instances children have had their limbs broken while others have had to receive medical treatment for their injuries.
10. **The fact is that in the context of school discipline, whatever the recommended corporal punishment or whoever administers it, it is still an act of violence against a child and is open to being used both subjectively and arbitrarily.**
11. The use of corporal punishment in schools in Guyana is a violation of Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
12. The UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children suggests that there must be a turning point - an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as "tradition" or disguised as "discipline". There can be no compromise in challenging violence against children. **Children's uniqueness - their potential and vulnerability, their dependence on adults - makes it imperative that they have more, not less, protection from violence.**
13. By its nature, corporal punishment is 'degrading or injurious punishment', which is prohibited in section 51(2) of the draft Bill.
14. Two remarks are usually made against those of us who oppose corporal punishment.

The first boils down to "If beating was good enough for me, it is good enough for my child", sometimes expressed in the boast that the speaker is the fine citizen s/he is because s/he learned discipline through corporal punishment. But the indiscipline throughout our institutions and throughout our streets is the product of women and men who suffered corporal punishment. The failures of reason and the easy recourse to violence in every situation in Guyana come from women and men who suffered corporal punishment.

The second is that we must be people who have never raised or taught children. To this our answer is "Not so." Many people of all classes and backgrounds have recognised that there is a greater demand on the teachers to provide remedies for the dysfunctions of the society and we call on the Government to provide the necessary resources to teachers to discipline by non-violent means instead of retaining abusive powers.

14. It is said that 'most Guyanese' want beating of children. This can only be proven by a referendum.

We therefore call for the removal of the corporal punishment provisions from the Education Bill and for a clear abolition of corporal punishment in schools.

Annex A

The following persons supported the call made in December 2006 for the abolition of corporal punishment in schools.

- 1.Andaiye – Red Thread, former Teacher and acting Head Teacher
- 2.Karen DeSouza – Red Thread
- 3.Cora Belle Roberts, Red Thread, Mother, Grandmother,
- 4.Josephine Whitehead - Attorney at Law, Help & Shelter
- 5.Danuta Radzik- Help & Shelter, Women & Child Rights Advocate
- 6.Denise Dias – Mothers in Black
- 7.Beverley Harper – Alicea Foundation
- 8.Jade Harper – Alicea Foundation & Mothers in Black
- 9.Loekeshwari Ramnarace – Secondary School Student
- 10.Kala Seegopaul – Secretary of External Affairs National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is
- 11.Evelyn Hamilton – Chairperson, National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is
- 12.Terrence Simmons – Vice Chairperson, National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is
- 13.Afna Garnett-Deputy Director for the Municipal Day Care Services
- 14.Rev Dale Bisnauth, Minister of Religion
- 15.Paul Hardy, Leader of Guyana Action Party (GAP)
- 16.Rashleigh Jackson – Parent, former Foreign Minister, Grandparent
- 17.Magda Pollard – Recipient of CARICOM Triennial Award for Women
- 18.Savitri Balbahadur – Teacher and Educator
- 19.Vic Insanally – Businessman
- 20.Dr Frank Williams – Physician (ret.)
- 21.Dr. Frank Beckles - Psychiatrist
- 22.Maj.Gen.(rtd) Joe Singh, Guyana Citizens Initiative
- 23.Phillip Allsopp, Civil Engineer, former Ambassador to Brazil
- 24.Dr. Clive Thomas, Distinguished Professor, University of Guyana
- 25.Rev.Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Exec.Secretary,Church Renewal,Justice & Partnership,World Alliance of Reformed Churches
- 26.Krysta Bisnauth, University Student
- 27.Olga Bone – Educator; Head teacher and Education Officer (ret.)
- 28.Agnes Jones – Educator, Coordinator of Nursery Education Program, Ministry of Education (ret.)
- 29.Merlene Adams - Working Mother of 8, Grandmother of 31, and Great Grandmother of 5
- 30.Roxanne Myers – Peace Builders Network
- 31.Rolinda Kirton - Spirit of Guyana Movement
- 32.Phyllis Carter – Mother of five,
- 33.Sr. Mary Noel Menezes, Historian, Sister of Mercy
- 34.Dr. John Fredericks, M.D.
- 35.Andrew & Nicky Mendes
- 36.Elfreida Bissember, Curator, Artist
- 37.Elaine Radzik – Mother and Grandmother
- 38.Cecil Singh, Gardener, Father
- 39.Jennifer Crevalle - Working Mother of two
- 40.Bonita Harris – Parenting Educator
- 41.Leila Jagdeo – Guyana Book Foundation
- 42.Jean La Rose, Mother, Indigenous Peoples' Rights Advocate
- 43.Hamala Sharma – Child Rights Advocate
- 44.Kojo McPherson - Youth Leader & Human Rights Advocate
- 45.Joel Simpson, Stacey Gomes - SASOD
- 46.Rohan Sagar – Musician & Peace builder,
- 47.Bharat Kissoon – Father
- 48.Abbas Mancey - Peace Builder,
- 49.Desmond Alli - Artist
- 50.Pauline Mangal - Jardine, Mother of two
- 51.Treena Dundas – Conflict Transformation Lecturer, University of Guyana & Spirit of Guyana
- 52.Kenneth Daniels – Peace Builder & Science of Spirituality
- 53.Keeran Persaud, Vishal Seeraj - Society for Empowerment and Holistic Advancement

54. Dr. Raquel Thomas - Mother & Forest Ecologist
55. Egbert Carter – Civil Engineer, Father
56. Vanda Radzik – Educator & Women’s Rights Advocate
57. Indra Ramadhar – Domestic Worker, Mother
58. Lisa Thompson – Social Worker, Mother
59. Sharon Ousman-Arjoon - Natural Resources Manager
60. Roxroy Bollers, Simone Mangal – Citizens United Against Sexual Offenders and Predators
61. Cynthia Massay, Rehabilitation Officer, Ptolemy Reid Centre
62. Dr. Suraiya Ismail, Mother, Nutritionist
63. Janette Bulkan, Mother, Teacher
64. Jocelyn Dow, Businesswoman
65. Anata Alva, Teacher & Mentor
66. Eusi Kwayana, Teacher, Father, Grandfather, former Member of Parliament (WPA)
67. Halima Khan, Mother, Women & Child Rights Activist
68. Joycelyn Bacchus, Mother, Women & Child Rights Activist
69. Deep Ford, Senior Economist, United Nations FAO
70. Rachel Hibbin, Mother, Social Development Administrator
71. Rodney Davis, Parent, Amerindian Leader, Social Development & Environmental Advocate
72. Rupert Roopnaraine, Parent, Writer, Politician - former Member of Parliament (WPA)
73. Shirley Melville, Mother, Indigenous Leader, former Member of Parliament (GAP)
74. Dr. Ian McDonald, Father, Writer, Corporate Executive
75. Chelsea Fung Secondary School student
76. Dominique Dias- Secondary School student
77. Kayla Reece Secondary School student
78. Nico Rodrigues Secondary School Student
79. Javed Rahaman – Secondary School Student
80. Joshua Abdool – Secondary School Student
81. Cary MacDonald – Secondary School Student
82. Nikhil Ramkarran - Father-to-be, Attorney-at-Law, Chairperson GASCI
83. Sandra Kurtzious - Mother, Attorney-at-Law, Secretary to the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church of Guyana
84. Timothy Jonas- Father, Attorney-at-Law
85. Jaya Manickchand - Attorney-at-Law
86. Jordan Jeffrey- Secondary school student
87. Patsy Hamid – Clerk, Mother of 2
88. Darlene Hawker – PA, Mother
89. Shaleeza Saleem-Josie – Typist, Mother
90. Paula Gonsalves – Mother, Typist
91. Municka Sheoprashad – Mother, Typist
92. Donna Williams – Receptionist
93. Chandroutie Deonaraine – Typist, Mother
94. Stanley Neblett – Clerk
95. Dianne Jardim – Mother of 2, Clerk
96. Savitri Kissoon – Mother of 2, Conveyancing Clerk
97. Jairam Beepat – Father of 3, Legal Clerk
98. Mohendra Arjune – Father, Legal Officer
99. Anita Calorio – Accounts Clerk
100. Arlene Ross – Mother, Accounts Clerk
101. Deborah Vieira – Clerk, Mother
102. Kamal Ramkarran – Attorney-at-Law
103. Alison Craig – Legal Clerk
104. Andrea Rohlehr - McAdam – Daughter, Civil Rights Advocate
105. Alissa Trotz - Mother, University Lecturer
106. Khalleel Mohammed, Ph.D father and University lecturer in Religion.
107. Miles Fitzpatrick Father, Attorney-at-Law
108. Elizabeth Cox Insurance Executive
109. Howard Cox Insurance Executive
110. Carol Doonauth Personal Assistant
111. Irshad Ali Insurance Sales Manager;

- 112. Dianne Persaud Insurance Manager
- 113. Sandy Basdeo Insurance Manager
- 114. Tooladhai Singh Secretary
- 115. Hansraj Singh Insurance Sales Representative
- 116. Ramesh Persaud - Insurances Sales Representative
- 117. Joyce Ramcharran Insurance Sales Representative
- 118. Anant Rancharan Insurance Manager
- 119. Sherry Gopaul' Insurance Supervisor
- 120. Monica and Shawn Mc Grath
- 121. Dr David Singh
- 122. David Dabydeen
- 123. Ann Geer
- 124. Everychild Guyana