

# **“Moving Forward Humanely: Proposals for the Abolition of Corporal Punishment in the Guyana Education System”**

## **SUMMARY**

The retention of corporal punishment as a permissible form of discipline in Guyana is utterly indefensible. It must be seen for what it is – violence against children. Beating a child is abusive and always wrong. It has survived only because in Guyana, the concept of a child as a human person in his/her own right is outweighed by authoritarian notions of children as property of adults, whose character is to be shaped by fear, pain and suffering.

Corporal punishment abuses children, demeans teachers and fosters no positive values whatever. Furthermore, by violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which is now part of Guyanese law, it is illegal.

Abolition of corporal punishment would help to dissolve the image of indecisiveness and ambivalence about violence in general which the Government has attracted. Such responsible leadership would also challenge rather than pander to the violence-oriented elements in the society.

In 2001 a Committee of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and citizens convened by the Chief Education Officer proposed a policy to phase out the use of corporal punishment in a positive manner, respectful of all affected persons and which educates the society in general how to move forward humanely. This made clear that both the political and professional leadership of the MoE has been prepared for several years to take the step to abolish corporal punishment. They should now be given the overwhelming political support of Parliament to implement such a policy.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

1. Safeguards to ensure corporal punishment be used in a measured way, as a punishment of last resort, have decisively failed. The last five years have witnessed instances of young (mainly primary age) school children suffering broken bones, lacerations and other disfigurements from corporal punishment by teachers. (cf attachments).
2. The average school environment negates the conditions necessary for discretionary use of violence, particularly the absence of an integrated system of educational values,

stressful conditions of work (over-crowded classes, low salaries etc), teachers poorly trained in management of pupils and an increasingly violent larger society.

3. The current practice is justified by a piece of colonial legislation (Reg.37/1943) put in place originally for use in “Training (Correctional) Institutions” not schools.
4. Since 1991 Education regulations set out alternative forms of punishment , namely: i) Specific tasks or assignments ii) Detention iii) Loss of privileges and iv) Denial of concessions.
5. In June 1993 the Chief Education Officer issued Circular #3 which stated:  
  
“Corporal punishment (by teachers’ own statements) has often been administered for unsatisfactory work. The responsibility for really poor work in most cases rests upon the teacher or, when attendance is irregular, upon the parents and in neither case is punishment of the child likely to have any beneficial effect whatever. On the contrary, it tends to make the child resentful while the inefficient teacher will invariably use it as a cloak for his inefficiency.”
6. In October 1996 CARICOM Governments adopted *The Belize Commitment to Action for the Rights of the Child*. They committed themselves “to review and revise the relevant laws, policies and programmes to fully comply with the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child”.
7. In 2001 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recognized that different forms of violence against children, such as corporal punishment, bullying, harassment and abuse, and verbal and emotional abuse were interlinked and that violence in the home and school context reinforced one another.
8. In early 2004 the 35<sup>th</sup>. Session of the UN Committee on the CRC recommended that Guyana should expressly prohibit corporal punishments in schools.

## **PROCESS FOR THE ABOLITION OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

1. Corporal punishment must be taken off the statute books.

2. The List of “Suggested Alternatives to Corporal Punishment” developed in 2001 by the MoE should be updated, codified and introduced into the school system as soon as possible.
3. Educators, parents and children must be assisted to develop positive values of discipline rather than cling to a punitive mind-set. These values should be reflected in appropriate legislation, particularly the Education Act and the Children’s Act.
4. Teacher Training should incorporate appropriate courses to address issues of resolving conflict and stress management.
5. The Ministry of Education must act decisively to promote a more humane environment in the school system. Violence by teachers must be seen publicly to attract serious penalties.
6. A campaign to educate the public around this process should be set in train.

**Guyana Human Rights Association**

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