

The Case for Atrocities by the Army in the Rupununi Uprising is Supported by Preliminary Findings.

Seelochan Beharry Ph.D

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Mr. Reginald Dipoo, a retired soldier from the GDF, had written (KN - 5th Aug, 2005) to reassure us, that during the Rupununi Uprising, no atrocities by the army (or segments of it) against the Amerindians had ever taken place. Mr. Dipoo stated that he was there from the beginning and stayed on for 6 weeks. Assurance of his personal presence, and his vouching for the credibility and professional conduct of the officers and soldiers seem very compelling. We would all like this to be true. It seems that the story (or sequence of events) is more complex than initially appeared.

Since this may be the first time that Mr Dipoo and possibly others are hearing of these allegations, then there is a greater need to investigate the circumstances beyond the mentioned sources that were already cited in the first letter (KN and SN, July 8th, 2005). Under the circumstances of being distant from the original sources and with only web resources at my disposal, I dug deeper and found revealing and troubling documentation of this event. However, the findings run contrary to Mr. Dipoo's assurances.

Dr Odeen Ishmael (http://www.guyanaca.com/features/trail_diplomacy_pt5.html) wrote in his chapter on the Rupununi Uprising (Ch 26, page 5) in his book (The Trail of Diplomacy) that: "After the uprising was crushed, claims were made by numerous Guyanese, including Rupununi Amerindians, that particularly in the northern savannahs the security forces had harassed, and even killed, a large number of Amerindians in putting down the revolt and in their subsequent "mopping up" operations which continued for weeks after the revolt was over. Many Amerindians were so fearful of the security forces that they fled over the border to seek refuge in Brazil. The allegations of harassment and killings were subsequently denied by the Government of Guyana and the administration of the Guyana Defence Force, both of which claimed that no one was killed in the suppression of the rebels." Note these allegations came out despite the fact that the area was declared a restricted area and entry was only permitted to security, Govt., and top PNC personnel. The Guyanese and International presses were excluded.

Most likely in response to these allegations, the Govt brought in Bishop Guilly (Most of the Amerindians were Roman Catholics. The Church was considered the traditional Guardians of the Amerindians), but denied him any access to the 'war zone'. Dr. Ishmael continues: " The Roman Catholic Bishop of Georgetown, the Reverend R.L. Guilly, was allowed by the Ministry of Home affairs to make a four-day tour of the southern Rupununi Savannahs to see the conditions of the Amerindians... However, he was not allowed to visit the northern Rupununi where the rebellion actually took place." Bishop Guilly reported: " The Amerindians were still nervous and that a number of them had fled across the border to Brazil." We have no public record if Bishop Gully (who saw a burnt school) was curious and/or if any explanation was given as to why he thought the Amerindians were nervous and fleeing their homes and leaving personal possessions behind. One can only conclude that something awful and terrifying had befallen them in their own homeland of Guyana. People usually flee in a hurry when faced with e.g. total national economic disaster, disease, death and destruction (or rumours of such events)-e.g. Sudan, Niger, and Rwanda.

Despite the fact that Bishop Guilly did not actually visit the areas where there were military activities, he concluded: “I am happy to say that I am quite satisfied that there have been no atrocities.” It is unlikely that he would have used those words, unless he was asked to confirm that there were ‘no atrocities’. Moreover, it is curious why he would say ‘no atrocities’ when he had no access to the sites in the northern Rupununi where the revolt occurred. Only the archives of the Church may reveal the documentation of the Bishop’s report. (It may be lying around somewhere waiting to see the light of day. What did the prestigious Catholic Standard reported? Hopefully, the priests and missionaries who were there (e.g. Jesuit), tell their stories; or, were they also expelled?)

Dr O. Ishmael continues: “However, the leader of the Opposition, Dr. Jagan, who had applied to the Government to visit the Rupununi District, which was now designated a restricted area to non-Amerindians, was refused permission by the Ministry of Home Affairs to visit the area to examine the situation there. As a result of this refusal, the PPP sent two of its leading Amerindian members, Eugene Stoby, a Member of Parliament, and Basil James to the Rupununi by the Guyana Airways passenger’s flight to make on-the-spot observations. But on landing at the Lethem airfield, they were detained by the GDF authorities and sent back to Georgetown (on the return flight)... where they were rigorously questioned before being released.”

“Based on the refusal to allow Dr. Jagan and the two PPP Amerindian members of Parliament from going to the Rupununi, the PPP expressed the view that the Government had something to hide and that, most likely, some Amerindians had been killed by the GDF in the process of stamping out the rebellion. The PPP felt that the Government’s statement that no Amerindian was killed in the crushing of the rebellion was untrue since it was apparent that the army met resistance, which caused it to burn down a number of buildings in which Amerindians had entrenched themselves. It may be unique, the PPP stated for an army to crush an armed rebellion without inflicting any loss of life on the rebel forces.” What were the Army and Government hiding so that Dr C. Jagan and two elected Amerindian representatives were denied access to these areas and the remaining inhabitants?

Dr C. Jagan was certainly no rabble-rouser nor was he prone to wild exaggerations, yet he said in the July-September issue of the *Thunder* stated that: “**The government having ruthlessly crushed the rebellion...is moving to militarize our politics.**” His sources must have been well-informed/convincing for him to utter such words publicly.

The Govt. proudly proclaimed that the army had **crushed** the rebellion. The Govt.’s website (www.gina.gov.gy/archive/features/features/f041108-2.html) states that: “There was a confrontation with insurgents and members of the GDF. The soldiers regain control of Karasabi, Lethem, Annai, and Good Hope. Four members of the GDF were seriously injured, but there were no fatalities...Rebels fled to Brazil...Insurgents were captured...” The army’s website (www.gdf.org/majoroperations.htm) states: “There was a confrontation with the insurgents and members of the GDF. Karasabi was the first to be retaken, subsequently Lethem, Annai, and Good Hope. Four members of the GDF were seriously injured but there was no fatality. The rebels fled to Brazil... and this retaking was a brilliant GDF operation to capture the insurgents.” The accounts given by both the Govt and army are basically the same. It must have been a very serious confrontation for 4 soldiers to be seriously injured. If this is true then we can expect serious retaliation with loss of life (unless the injuries were caused by friendly fire). The statement is somewhat contradictory in that we are told that the rebels fled to Brazil and the insurgents were captured. What is the difference between a ‘rebel’ and an ‘insurgent’ in this case? None of

the 'insurgents' who were tried in G/town (Judge Arthur Chung, later President of Guyana) were found guilty of treason.

Dr. Paul Tennessee (Guyana, The Race Problem (1965- 1992) quoted Dr Andrew Saunders' article: Amerindians in Guyana: A minority group in a multi-ethnic society: "A contingent of the Guyana Defence Force was flown to the area and put down the rebellion within two days. Some seventy Amerindians were rumoured to have been killed in the suppression... There has been some movement of Guyanese Amerindians into adjacent territories following the suppression of the rebellion and the general behaviour of the GDF has further increased bitterness and resentment among the Amerindian populations." (http://www.guyanajournal.com/race2_pt.html)

Dr. Frantz. J.T. Lee wrote (The Evolution-Involution of Cooperative Socialism in Guyana, 1930-1984) in his section of the Rupununi Amerindian insurrection, 1968-1969 that: "Some 70 Amerindians were rumoured to have been killed in this aggressive military campaign, which was viewed as a follow-up operation to purge the rats out of their holes." (<http://www.franz-lee.org/files/coopguy.html>)

Mr. Christopher Carrico in Caracas meeting (Re: Globalize Resistance, Indigenous Peoples as Peasants of America. Marxist mailing list archives) wrote: " While only a few Amerindians were involved in the uprising, it was the Amerindians who paid the greatest price..." (<http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/marxism/2003w42/msg00043.htm>)

Mr Malcolm Harripaul (former GDF officer) wrote that: " The GDF brutally put down the Rupununi uprising amidst numerous allegations of rape of Amerindian women..." (Guyana Under Siege: Historical outline of the Security Forces in Guyana. (<http://www.guyanaunderseige.com/other%20single%20%/imbalance.htm>))

A computerized translation of one Spanish source (Mr Oswaldo Ramirez Coline, The Insurrection of the Rupununi - Monografias.com) claimed that: "flame thrower was used to evacuate the families from their houses." and "The indigenous populations of Pirara and Annai were bombed house by house, which were reduced to ashes by the troops of the government." "Some Indigenous villages were set afire completely." " During the confrontations there were 20 dead between rebels and government forces... (troops of 200 hundred soldiers)." (I cannot re-access this source, but I do have a hard copy.)

Mr. L.F.S. Burnham (Jan.4th, 1969 Broadcast to the nation, see Dr Odeen, p 3,Ch 26) was most likely alluding to the same set of events, when he had stated: "Today the security forces have continued their operations...the centres of terrorist activity at Pirara, Good Hope and Sunnyside have been razed to the ground by our forces...a number of persons have been arrested". This same broadcast mentioned "the loss of nine lives."

The Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations commissioned a report by an investigative journalist (www.pantribalconfederacy.com/confederacy/report1.php). This 6-year (1992-1999) study gave some numbers to the situation. The report states: " Finding the rebels beyond reach, the GDF commanding Officers and soldiers vented their rage on the innocent Makushi and Wapishana tribesmen and women left behind. (1) 53 Amerindian homes were burned. (2) 81 Amerindian girls and women were raped. This included the heinous gang-raping of a 12 year-old child who was left bleeding and unconscious. (3) 147 Makushi and Wapishana men and boys were arrested. (4) 326 Makushi and Wapishana men and boys between the ages of 14-61 were severely beaten, some into unconsciousness. (5) Some prisoners were locked-up with the corpses. (6) An

estimated 500 head of Amerindian owned cattle were slaughtered.” I was informed by the Confederacy that 70 - 100 Amerindian killed would be within their lower estimates.

The above-mentioned ‘nightmarish atrocities’ or ‘brilliant operation by the GDF’ would explain: 1. Why the Amerindians fled to Brazil and Venezuela for their lives leaving their homes and possessions behind; 2. Why Bishop Guilly observed that they were nervous; 3. Why the area was closed (or quarantined) to outsiders (local and international) for years; 4. Why access was denied to their legal and elected representatives, Mr James, Mr Stoby and Dr. Jagan; 5. Why the army’s accounts are sketchy, and contradictory; and 6. Why the Amerindians still distrust the military to such an extent that many have not returned to their homeland. Guyanese fleeing for their lives (leaving their very homes and possessions behind) after experiencing real traumatic events is not unprecedented in Guyana’s history. (Examples in living memory are: 1. Wismar’s survivors - fleeing the inflicted terror; and 2. Buxton’s residents - fleeing the violence of the criminal gangs.)

I have deliberately not paraphrased the writings of the above authors, so that readers can see directly what was written and also visit the sources themselves. In this way they can come to their own conclusions. Hopefully, other researchers can access other sources.

The request that I visit the Rupununi now would be difficult to bear fruit, since the evidence is in the traumatic actual experiences of Amerindian people and others. These folks have been eliminated or fled, or those who suffered have moved, died, etc. It would require a long time to establish confidence with the people to get them to talk to an outsider. (Whom can they trust? Even their traditional Guardian, the Roman Catholic Church, did not stand up for them. Fear is a powerful silencer of the truth.) The physical evidence of burnt homes and other buildings would long have been demolished. In addition, this area was closed (or quarantined) for such a long time (years) that Dr. Jagan had complained (several times) about this lack of access.

We therefore cannot (at present) reconcile these findings (and those previously mentioned - KN and SN, July 8th, 2005 and S. Ashby’s letter in SN, July 30, 2005) with the testimony of Mr Dipoo (KN, 2nd July, 2005).

In view of the compelling preliminary information, it is now necessary for Mr R Dipoo, and his former CO Mr Joe Singh, ex- and current-COS, and others to push for an investigation. In this way, it may be, that the good name of Mr Dipoo, and other innocent army personnel may be cleared. We certainly do not want any decent former army personnel to be living under a cloud of suspicion by society. Mr Dipoo and others may rightly feel indignation at others for questioning the conduct of the Army in this affair; but, that is nothing compared to the trauma, pain, suffering, upheaval, and destruction the Amerindians experienced when the Army landed upon them.

Better yet is for the Commander in Chief, President B. Jagdeo, and the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Ms Carolyn Rodrigues, in the present Govt. to seek a formal investigation into the whole affair. Our history however unpleasant must be told, hopefully we may at least learn (among other things) that the past always return.

The impact of these events (real or imagined) on the people was very significant. I shall try to look at these in a future letter. (Any help would be appreciated.)

NB: Please contact Seelochan Beharry at: seelochanbeharry@yahoo.com

(Permission is given to the Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Indigenous Tribal Nations to publish this article on its website - Dated. 22nd Aug.,2005)