

Guyana Honorary Consulate
#19 Pearl Drive, Eden Terrace
St. Michael, Barbados

15 February 2008

Ms. Joan Hoffman
Organising Committee
Holetown Festival Office
St. James, Barbados

SUBJECT: OFFER OF ASSISTANCE IN RESEARCH ON BARBADOS' FIRST SETTLERS

Dear Ms. Hoffman:

The Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Guyana in Barbados presents its compliments and wishes to refer to the above subject matter.

The Consulate extends best wishes for the outcome of yet another Holetown Festival, one of Barbados' oldest and better known festivals which, in addition to having an educational component for locals and visitors about the island's rich history, is also part of the very significant and internationally recognized tourist product here.

Whenever I can, I take my family to visit the most colourful and varied Festival activities. I still have fond memories of the contributions of Alfred Pragnell, a personal friend, to it. When I drive by the Holetown area where the Festival is staged I sometimes look across at the monument, located in front of the public library, commemorating the arrival in 1627 of the first English settlers to the island together with 10 African slaves on the vessel Olive Blossom.

As you may well know, those who arrived in 1627 were not the first settlers. This falsehood is often repeated, unwittingly and without any desire to distort the historical record, by for example those in the educational and tourism sectors. The true and equally important first settlers, as documented by archaeological excavations of their villages, were members of the region's indigenous, or aboriginal peoples, commonly called "Amerindians" or "Caribs". There is extensive literature on this including books available at the Barbados Museum which collaborated with archaeological teams from the University of London in the excavations and which has exhibits of the first settlers' material culture in their public galleries.

My view, against the background of the need to provide a fair, well rounded and accurate picture of the region's settlement and the recognition of the historical contributions and achievements of the Caribbean/Latin America indigenous peoples, is that there should be a more meaningful mention in the Holetown Festival celebrations of these first true settlers who were aboriginal or native peoples. Guyana has a sizable number of (genetically linked) indigenous peoples, popularly known as Amerindians, as does neighbouring countries such as Venezuela and Dominica.

It is generally known that the first settlers came to the Eastern Caribbean islands, including Barbados, in pre-Columbus by island hopping in their big canoes from what is now known as the Venezuela area. From my own research and discussions with Dr. Peter Drewitt, the head of the University of London teams, it appears most likely that earlier generations of these first explorers/settlers also came from Guyana (because at that time of absence of borders there was movements of peoples in search of game and agricultural space, for example). All of them of course first came from what is now the People's Republic of China in earlier migrations many thousands of years before.

It is true that when the English settlers and their slaves arrived in Barbados they reportedly found the island uninhabited. It is thought the first true settlers had shortly before been removed through diseases brought from Europe, they were captured and taken away as slaves or simply went back to neighbouring St. Lucia or St. Vincent from whence the later generations (of those who left the Venezuela/Guyana area) departed to get to Barbados.

The time frame is also somewhat challenging, though not an obstacle for our purposes. It is probable that when the Olive Blossom came in 1627, the first settlers had left within a past generation. It is probable they left an agricultural lay out (clearing of forest tracts, irrigation system and ploughed lands) for the settlers to build their sector on.

I do feel though that further research is needed to on this and to determine the relatively recent origins of the first true settlers. If it is indeed correct they came from Venezuela/ Guyana this should continue to be acknowledged.

There are therefore two things which I feel the Hometown Festival organizers need to look at and act upon. One is correcting what may come across presently as the skewed and misrepresentative message that the people who came in 1627 were the first settlers and therefore they alone to be worthy of all commemorative activities. The sterling exploratory and settler skills and achievements of aboriginal peoples, the region's native peoples, are equally important and worthy of mention.

The second thing, especially against the backdrop of the deepening of Caribbean /Latin America integration and friendship, is to acknowledge the geographical origins of the first true and authentic settlers which is the Venezuela/Guyana area. This also means acknowledging the significant and worthy cultural and material conditions and civilization which led to their essentially good human exploratory and enterprisingly settler outlook. In this regard, the Consulate would be most willing to assist the Festival Committee in any way in elaborating or widening its existing knowledge of this aboriginal or native peoples dimension. The Consulate is in touch with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in Guyana and knowledgeable resource persons at places such as the Walter Roth Museum.

The Consulate would also consider, as we discussed in our telephone conversation earlier today, bringing a cultural troupe from Guyana to take part in next year's event.

You should be informed that the Consulate has also put a proposal to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Barbados and Guyana for the erection of a suitable monument at an appropriate location, perhaps at the site of one of the Amerindian villages here, to recognize the presence of the first true and authentic settlers of the islands whose forbearers originally came from what is now Guyana and Venezuela. This would be built by volunteer Guyanese labour and Guyanese and Barbadian materials (wood and stone) from a design approved by the Ministries. In my discussions with the former Ambassador at the Venezuelan Embassy here, Ms. Corrina Russian, I got the impression that the Venezuelan government would be fully supportive of such a gesture to deepen the friendship and co-operation among the countries and and to further recognize the contributions of past and present Venezuelan and Guyanese people of Amerindian descent.

This monument would in no way undermine, detract from or belittle the already existing monument to the 1627 arrivals.

Once again, I wish the Festival Planning Committee every success in this year's event and you can be assured that I will be among the well wishes to support you in this commendable activity which has assisted in the making Barbados an even better place for all of us.

Accept Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration,

Respectfully Yours,

NORMAN R. FARIA
(Guyana's Honorary Consul in Barbados)

cc_Hon.Carolyn Rodrigues, Minister of Amerindian Affairs
(Guyana)