



GUYANA NEWS

## Ramson Jr condemned over defence of Bamia school contract

-says new company can be example of success, accuses APNU+AFC of failing black community



Charles Ramson Jr

By Stabroek News November 30, 2021



Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport Charles Ramson Jr has been faced with a torrent of criticism over his statements in support of the contentious award of a multi-million dollar contract, which he said should be seen as an example of success to inspire black youth.

His comments, including the accusation that the former APNU+AFC failed the black community, were made last Friday during an appearance on the Hits and Jam 94.1 Boom FM afternoon

programme, where he spoke in support of the award of the contract to St8ment Investment Inc.

The company, owned by one of the programme's hosts, Kerwin Bollers, was recently awarded a \$346 million contract for the construction of the Bamia Primary School in Linden and there have been questions about the process used to select the relatively new company, which has no track record in construction.

The announcement of the award has attracted scrutiny over the bona fides of the company.

	<b>\$6.38</b>	<b>\$11.49</b>	<b>\$2.39</b>	<b>\$17.46</b>
	<b>\$33.76</b>	<b>\$5.65</b>	<b>\$62.24</b>	<b>\$13.73</b>

"I know you have probably seen in the newspapers that a certain company has been awarded a contract," Bollers said during the programme, triggering a response from Ramson.

"Here is what I want to say about that..." Ramson began, indicating that he was speaking as a politician and as leader in the country. He then went on to state that he became a lawyer because he saw his father was a lawyer.

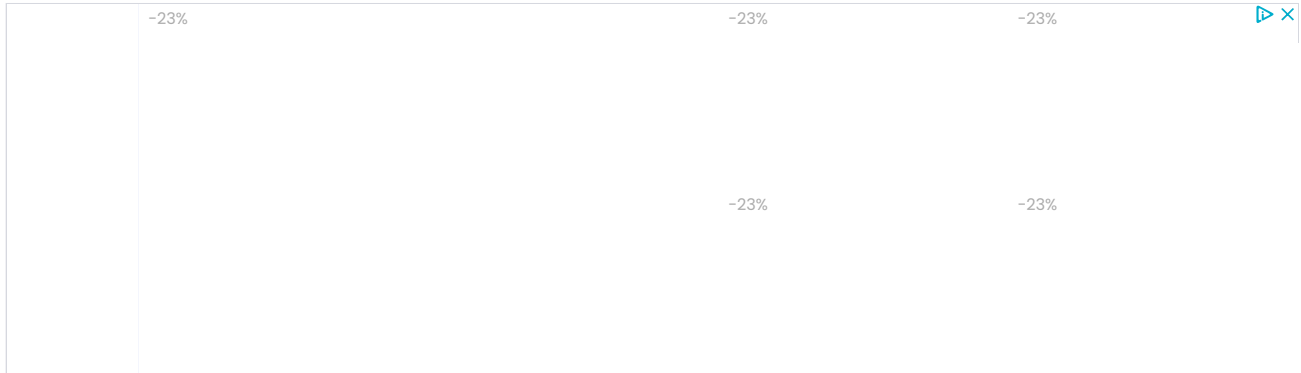
His father is Senior Counsel Charles Ramson, who is a former Attorney General.

"I admired the fact that he went to work every day, he would put on his suit, he would put on his coat. I saw what kind of prosperous life it brought for him. I saw how it helped to take care of his family, what [were] the opportunities that provided for us," Ramson continued.

"And I think that in the black community, young black kids also need lots of examples of success because they have to be able to see that there is a pathway in order for them to build that successful life. And it bothers me a lot when I hear people who just came out of government who spent 1.4 trillion dollars in this country and failed the black community, failed the black community and still are walking around the place saying things that they are, they have been

capable or were capable of taking the black community...or giving the leadership that would be able to create wealth in the country and among the black community.

"And I am very disappointed to see when the companies that are criticized, like yours [referring to Bollers], or I am very disappointed when they are criticized from "black leaders" because they should be far more supportive."



At this point Bollers said "Definitely" as Ramson continued. "...from the point that seeing that this translates into success because what it does it helps to create the examples of success that a lot of people who once they see it they can be inspired by it."

He then accused the opposition APNU+AFC of only talking about politics and not being able to provide wealth for the black community as he extolled the record of the government in transforming Guyana and providing assets for Guyanese through the distribution of land.

### Condemnation

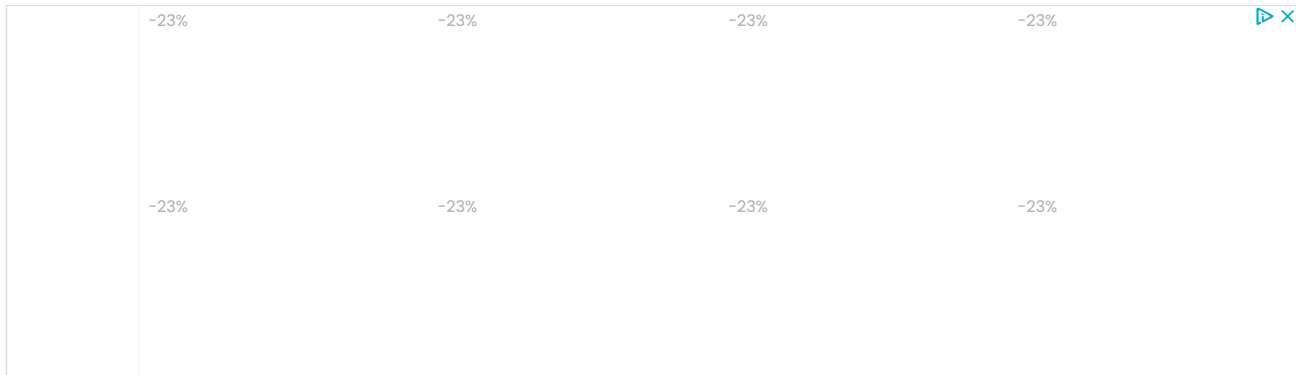
Ramson's comments have attracted widespread condemnation, with both partners in the main opposition coalition APNU and AFC issuing statements calling his comments offensive. Many have also taken to social media to state that Guyana's black youth have role models all around them.

Ramson yesterday issued a video statement on his Facebook page saying that his comments had been misconstrued as saying there were no role models in the black community. He acknowledged that there are thousands of Afro-Guyanese role models, including persons who have shaped him, while saying that his statements were in reference to the attack on St8tment.

Opposition Leader Joseph Harmon, however, said he found the comments by Ramson to be "biased, prejudicial and laced with racial

undertones”.

“As Leader of the Opposition, I strongly condemn Ramson’s verbal lientery. The belief by Ramson that he has the authority to speak on such matters in the manner in which he did is not limited to him but rather this mindset is pervasive in the PPP,” Harmon said in a statement.



When contacted, prominent attorney Nigel Hughes told Stabroek News that most black families have parents who get up and go to work, just like Ramson’s father did. He noted that the fact Ramson’s father wore a tie and someone else didn’t is immaterial or whether the parent struggled to provide a better life for their children. He said those parents are role models and a significant amount of African families have those identical role models.

“He could not be seriously suggesting that commercial enterprise that was recently formed, with no history or capacity in the specific field, that won tenders, that is the basis on which the African community should aspire to become economically better off. He could not seriously be suggesting that...,” Hughes told this newspaper.

While he did not specify, Hughes was alluding to St8tment Investment. During his comments, Ramson noted that Bollers hailed from Essequibo and Lodge, and Rawle Ferguson, another of the company’s owners, came from Plaisance, all areas “where you need inspiration and the part of the problem that is coming from the PNC and the APNU+AFC camp is that they don’t have examples of how they have taught their own followership to be wealthy, they don’t have the examples and they don’t know what to teach them..”

The AFC, in its statement, questioned “How are the masses of black people, or even brown people, empowered here by generating wealth for one elite black company formed the other day – St8tment Investment Inc?”

It pointed out that the awarding of the contract “incidentally, has been critiqued by many commentators as not in accordance with procurement requirements”

“The Minister seems most annoyed that the Opposition brought this issue to the public’s attention in the first place. The scandal behind what the Minister is saying though is what ought to be pored over. It is that the Coalition government is wrong for representing all Guyanese and equalizing the opportunity for all Guyanese to benefit, when they were office. What the Minister insidiously suggests is that the Coalition should have represented only its, Coalition, “fellowship”,” the statement added.

St8ment was incorporated in March of this year and its principals are Ferguson and Bollers, of Hits and Jams Entertainment along with Aubrey ‘Shanghai’ Major and Kashif Muhammed of the Kashif and Shanghai football tournament. They have all been linked to the ruling PPP/C government.

Since taking office last August, the PPP/C government has appointed Major as Chairman of the Guyana Tourism Authority, while Muhammed is Chairman of the National Sports Commission’s board.

St8ment Investment is new in the industry and though its principals have claimed to be working on a housing project, they have not released any details about such.

According to the tender documents seen by this newspaper, bidders were required to show that they had experience in work of similar scope. That requirement raised further questions about how a company without a track record could secure this project.

Bidders were required to include “...experience in works of a similar nature and size for each of the last five (5) years, and details of work underway or contractually committed.”

## Happy

Meanwhile, Hughes said he was happy that Ramson made the statement because he has clearly raised the issue of the disproportionate distribution of the economic resources between the Indian and the African communities.

He described same as "...a matter of national concern upon which we should commence a real discussion".

And touching on the issue on his Facebook page, Guyanese Professor at Ohio University in the United States Dr. Vibert Cambridge said that it is unfortunate that Ramson, who is responsible for the nation's cultural development, "is consistent in stoking divisiveness and not promoting or encouraging solidarity". "At one time I excused the behaviour as exuberance and inexperience. Now it appears as unacceptable patterned and deliberate behavior," he noted.



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