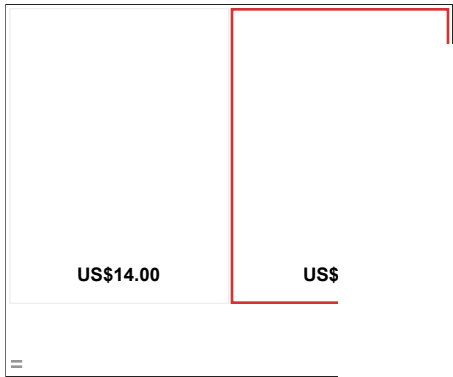




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US flouting Guyana's State authority over democracy and governance project- Luncheon

Posted by: GxMedia in News Sunday, 22 December 2013, 2:04 0 Comments

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Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Roger Luncheon

Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr Roger Luncheon has sharply criticised the decision by the United States (US) Ambassador Dr Brent Hardt to implement a governance project or aspects of it, under the auspices of USAID, despite strong objections by the Cabinet.

The American envoy has maintained that that the US and USAID have consulted adequately with the government about the US\$1.250 million Leadership and Democracy Project (LEAD). The embassy issued a document that showed that ongoing consultations with the Guyana government on various

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"This issue is an affront to Guyana's sovereignty," the Cabinet Secretary said. "It is essentially a challenge by the US Ambassador in one, acknowledging that he, they, have ignored Cabinet's disapproval, and are implementing elements of this project, not in any guise of having a discourse on the matter, but just to inform the government through the media of what position has been adopted by the American authorities. That is what at this point occupies the minds of the Presidency and Cabinet".

The US Ambassador's resort to the media, in this case the Stabroek News to declare their intentions of pursuing the project despite government's position, borders on the "grossest disrespect and abuse of his diplomatic presence," according to the Cabinet Secretary.

He noted that all other "antecedent events" about the project can now be considered moot. "The issue is, the Cabinet of this nation, a sovereign country, indicated to the American Ambassador its definitive position on this matter, and according to the reports in the Stabroek News of the 19th of December, the Ambassador in an article, has essentially said, "I am going ahead with what I want to go ahead with, and this decision of Cabinet, disapproving this project, I will ignore, I will disregard, indeed he has effectively challenged state power."

The views by some sections of society that the governance project should be entertained and even implemented due to its perceived importance is not the main issue, stressed Dr. Luncheon. "It is not about the project and the US\$1.2 million that we're going to lose, it is not that. Cabinet made a decision, a definitive decision that is where the matter ought to have ended!"

The USAID project was not approved by Cabinet and this was indicated to the relevant authorities on October 26, 2013 formally. Unconfirmed reports later indicated that the USAID project activities were being implemented and Cabinet wrote to the US Ambassador, requesting clarity on the matter.

On December 19, a meeting was convened among President Donald Ramotar, Dr. Luncheon and Ambassador Hardt. It was noted by Dr. Luncheon that, "The Ambassador was not categorical in affirming to the President and myself that yes, indeed, I have received confirmation of Cabinet's disapproval, notwithstanding which the American authorities have indeed continued to implement elements of the project. He was not definite in making those two assertions."

The next day, Stabroek News quoted the same ambassador as saying that the USAID project was being implemented despite the embassy being in receipt of the formal correspondence from Cabinet voicing its disapproval.

Foreign Affairs Minister Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett has been mandated by Cabinet to ascertain if indeed the statements made by the US Ambassador are attributed to him, said Dr. Luncheon. "We want the US Ambassador to confirm that what was read, that what was said, attributed to him is indeed accurately done by the reporter from Stabroek News. One can hardly expect the Ambassador at this stage of the game to disassociate himself from the remarks attributed to him, but for the record, we need a written submission where the Ambassador acknowledges the statements reported in the Stabroek News are indeed accurately reflective of the positions that he adumbrated, that it is a factual and accurate report".

Once this information is provided, government will "sit with the Americans and discuss this challenge, this flouting of state authority and this challenge to the exercise of authority by the Cabinet".

The Government and Guyana has benefitted from what has been described as a healthy engagement between the US through its USAID programme, according to the Cabinet Secretary. However, he said the actions concerning this specific project are "baffling and perplexing", noting that the apparent move by the US top diplomat, to challenge the authority of the state and to exert his powers in Guyana, need to be understood.

The issue of why this specific project is being used to confront the Guyana Government and disturb the healthy relationships that have evolved over time between the two governments is one that needs to be addressed, Dr. Luncheon said in closing.

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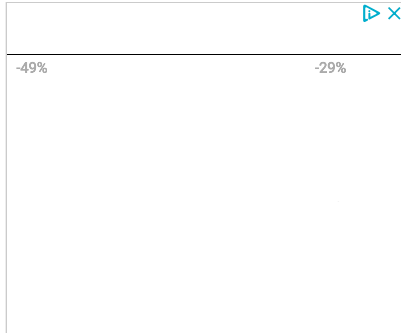
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