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USAID agreement breached over governance and democracy project

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Guyana on Tuesday accused United States of flouting an agreement with the Agency for International Development (USAID) by deciding to go ahead with a democracy and governance project that Georgetown discarded over concerns about a lack of consultation.

The President Donald Ramotar administration has also vehemently rejected claims by US Ambassador, Brent Hardt that the Guyana government had been consulted about the Leadership and Democracy Project (LEAD). Previous reports containing the background to the controversy can be read by clicking [US still executing abandoned democracy project- Luncheon](#) , [US denies virtually imposing democracy and governance project](#) and [US flouting Guyana’s State authority over democracy and governance project- Luncheon](#)

Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Roger Luncheon insisted that the project was conceived in the United States, Congressional funding approved and the contractor- International Republican Institute (IRI)- identified and the Guyana government was expected to accept the project without consultation. "All of those steps were concluded prior to any engagement with this administration on this project and that took place in late 2012," he said.

Luncheon challenged the American envoy to show where in the USAID-Guyana government agreement it was stated that government’s approval for projects was not required. "We have an agreement that governs the operations and presence of USAID here in Guyana," he said.

Although project documents released by the American embassy show that political parties will not receive funding under the project, Cabinet Secretary Dr. Roger Luncheon said a major concern was that they were earmarked to receive financial support. He said Guyana’s laws and policies did not provide for state funding much less foreign funding to be provided to political parties.

"There is nothing like that in the law or in the practice. The Americans came in this project and invited what is a profoundly sensitive issue that has not been dealt with by this government or governments as far back as the day from Independence- public support for political parties. That, indeed, represented a usurpation of our authority," he said. He said the Guyana government would have preferred for such activities to be supported through the Parliament or the Guyana Elections Commission.

Government also found objectionable that the US\$1.250 million LEAD project would support activities for the formulation of policies that may lead to constitutional reform. "We don’t amend the constitution that way. I don’t call in America to help us to amend the constitution and activities that address constitutional important roles and activities obviously can become part and parcel," he said.

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Luncheon refused to say whether the Guyana government would ask for Hardt to be recalled and the IRI staff to pack up and leave if the US State Department confirms that the American envoy’s reported comments in the privately-owned Stabroek News. Based on the response, government intends to examine the Guyana-USAID agreement to ascertain whether that aid agency could operate independently.

An avowed Marxist-Leninist and long-serving member of the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), Luncheon shrugged off suggestions that government harboured fears that the project was ultimately aimed at toppling it from power.

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The US, along with Britain, had played a major role in the 1960s to remove the Cheddi Jagan administration from office because of fears that he was planning to set up another communist outpost in the Western Hemisphere second to Cuba. At the same time, Luncheon said he could not conceive any reason for the US Ambassador’s posture on the project. “It is clearly inconsistent why this American Ambassador continues to defend this course of action, I don’t know. It is indefensible,” he said.

“I do not believe it is the US government’s policy. I cant understand why in the face of our rejection, notice of our rejection, to summons an exclusive interview and basically say Cabinet, Luncheon, Ramotar “screw you” I am doing what I want to do,” he said.

Luncheon, who is also Head of the Presidential Secretariat, recalled the Guyana government repeatedly asking the US Ambassador and the IRI Chief of Party from November 2012 to August 2013 for the project document rather than a one-pager. “The one-pager he gave us initially was clearly unsuitable...We had to keep pressing and demanding and insisting before that document came,” he said. After the document was received, Cabinet in October 2013 decided disapprove the project.

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