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US fact-finding mission still eager to meet with Guyana govt; denies association with New York-based Guyanese activist

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Team Leader and former Chair of the Georgia Black Caucus, Dee Dawkins-Haigler (centre)

A 13-member delegation of American politicians, business executives and civil society representatives on Tuesday expressed disappointment that President Irfaan Ali's administration has refused to meet with them on the thorny issue of racial discrimination mainly against Afro-Guyanese, allegations that government has repeatedly dismissed.

Team Leader and former Chair of the Georgia Black Caucus, Dee Dawkins-Haigler told a news conference that in 2021 she and other representatives had met Dr Ali and decided to return to conduct an assessment because "we have received numerous concerns". "It was really surprising to us that he has refused to meet with this delegation," she said.

A Guyana government delegation led by President Ali had travelled to Washington DC in August where they had sought to assure several American decision-makers that there was no discrimination and that Guyanese of all walks of life were benefitting from a number of initiatives.

Saying that she holds the Guyanese leader in "high esteem", Ms Dawkins-Haigler at the same time rejected assertions by government that her independent team was associated with United States-based Guyanese opposition activist, Rickford Burke, who had organised the Guyana Conference in mid-September in Washington DC. "No one on this delegation has ever met Rickford Burke in person and none of these people that is sitting beside me has ever had a conversation with him," she told a news conference that was held at the Critchlow Labour College.

In the mission's statement ahead of its arrival, it said they were coming in response to concerns raised by Attorney-at-Law Roysdale Forde, Catherine Hughes and David Patterson. Asked on Tuesday where those concerns had been raised, Ms Dawkins Haigler said those were done at various conferences in Washington DC and had "come back and forth to New York City" where they had met Congressman Hakeem Jeffries, Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, Congresswoman Maxine Waters among others. "These statements are being made right across the board and not just for Afro-Guyanese but Indo-Guyanese, Portuguese. Many people have reached out saying that there is not a fair system here in Guyana," she said.

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members. Without any evidence, basis or fact, the Government recklessly claimed that Mr. Burke wrote the mission's terms of reference and has pre-written a report. Neither Mr. Burke nor anyone else from CGID

(Caribbean Guyana Institute for Democracy) knows or has ever met these legislators. Only a hopelessly deceitful, reckless and paranoid government can demonstrate such audacious mendacity," CGID said.

Ms Dawkins-Haigler sought to assure the Guyana government that "we have no animosity towards the President for not meeting because he has that right as the sovereign leader to meet or not meet with any group as he deems necessary" and was ready to hold talks with the administration. She said none of the members of the delegation was paid by anyone to come to Guyana. She denied that the delegation was not interfering in Guyana's internal affairs and even if they were not invited to come at some point they would have visited to understand the conditions of the people of colour here.

At the end of the mission, she said a report would be compiled and presented a report to the United Nations, Black Caucus, White House, State Department, Congress and the National Black Caucus of State legislators. She hoped that her team would be able to meet with the administration so that its perspectives could be included in that report.

Ms Dawkins-Haigler said allegations included discrimination in the disbursement of funds, prejudicial award of contracts based on their race, political affiliation or public criticism of authorities, unfair treatment in the court system and educational disparities. She said documents containing "very alarming" concerns to back up some of the claims.

The delegation plans to visit New Amsterdam, Linden and Moch-Arcadia to listen to their concerns as well examine international and local reports to understand the extent of their deprivation and projections for the future.

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