

Speech by Ambassador Jernej Videtič
At the Opening of the Child Advocacy Center
Fort Wellington, Berbice
September 23, 2015

Madam Chairperson

Honourable Minister Volda Lawrence

Regional Chairman, Region 5, Mr. Vickchand Ramphal

Mrs. Ann Green, Director, Child Care and Protection Agency

Madam Patron, ChildLink, Mrs. Aameena Gafoor

Students

Parents

All

Good morning.

I am quite happy to be here today to witness and participate in the opening of this second Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) in Guyana. The European Union is proud to have provided financial assistance to the Empowering Children in Difficult Circumstances Initiative under which these Child Advocacy Centres are developed and made operational.

As we observe Child Protection Week, it is quite fitting that this Centre is officially opened today to further strengthen the strides already made in protecting our most valuable asset; our children. The concept of the CAC is significant for two main reasons. The CAC allows for the treatment of traumatised and affected children in one house; where these children can meet with a multi-disciplinary team of counsellors, representatives of the Ministry of Social Protection as well as the police and legal officers at the same time. Secondly, the CAC is a bold illustration that we are committed to working together to first rid this beautiful country of the terrible scourge of child abuse and to comfort and help those abused children to overcome the trauma experienced and bring the perpetrators to justice.

It was quite alarming to read the announcement made by the Honourable Minister of Social Protection that for this year 2015, there have been approximately 1.300 cases of child abuse reported, 335 of which are sexual abuse cases. This amplifies the need for the proper

functioning of this and all of the CACs. I note that the protocol for the operation of the CAC for the referral of children and the responsibility of each agency has been prepared and has already been signed by the Ministry of Social Protection. Honourable Minister Lawrence I congratulate you on this and want to urge all other parties (Guyana Police Force, Department of Public Prosecution, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health) involved to very quickly follow suit and have the protocol signed as well. The collaboration of all involved will be key to success. We must not further fail these 350 hurting children.

This partnership among the Child Care and Protection Agency, the Guyana Police Force, civil society and the development organisations is most commendable. This is exactly what is needed to tackle this very sore issue and I want to congratulate you and also to encourage you to make this initiative work, for the sake of Guyana's children. The Empowering Children in Difficult Circumstances Initiative foresees establishing and operating three such centres, I would like however to at this forum to promote the idea to the parties here to investigate the setting up of similar centres in the various regions of Guyana.

I note with great pleasure the Honourable Minister's announcement too that the Child Protection Agency is set to enhance its inter-agency and professional collaboration with various stakeholders, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) to expand the social network support for the families at the community level. It is imperative that this terrible vice of child abuse is attacked at the source; that programmes are engaged that will allow persons in the community to first identify signs of abuse, and to develop the habit of reporting such cases. It is imperative that we work with families and schools. The Tell Campaign is an example of a very good initiative that encourages children to speak out.

At the European Union, one of the main tenets on which our work is pillared is the defence of human rights. Around the world, and in Guyana, the European Union partners with Governments and civil society organisations to ensure the basic human rights of all; of women, of children, of the LGBT, of all minorities. You have a partner in the European Union. We are cognisant of the very significant role civil society plays in the promotion and defence of human rights. We are pleased with the collaboration between civil society and the Child Protection Agency to together work to tackle child abuse.

Guyana I am certain will soon commit towards the Sustainable Development Goals. I want to remind us here that child abuse is a threat to that Sustainable Development we seek and in this regard, I encourage you to continue the fight to rid this beautiful country of yours of child abuse.

Thank you.