



# 19<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY MESSAGE FROM MR. GODFREY STATIA, COMMISSIONER - GENERAL

January 27th 2019 marks the nineteenth anniversary of the establishment of the Guyana Revenue Authority. First headed by Mr. Edgar E. Heyligar and headquartered at the corner of East and Lamaha Sts., with its several offices at the original merged agencies' locations, the Authority moved its entire operations in 2014 under Mr. Khurshid Sattaur, to its current headquarters at 200-201 Camp St., Georgetown where it is currently visited by over 280,000 taxpayers on a yearly basis.

Since its establishment in the year 2000, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) has evolved and continues to evolve, increasing its infrastructure and technical capacity. With its mission being to promote compliance with Guyana's Tax, Trade and Border Laws and regulations, through education, quality service and responsible enforcement programmes, thereby contributing to the economic wellbeing of the people of Guyana, the Authority strives to gain recognition and respect through the integrity of its officers and the fairness and the equality of treatment in tax administration.

To this end, tax legislation has been continually tweaked, and moreso in the last three years, to improve customer service and efficiency in tax administration, and to extend the tax base, and bring relief to taxpayers. This has led to double digit increases in tax collections for 2017 and 2018, and at the same time, to decreases in personal income taxes for individuals and manufacturing firms and small businesses; as more taxpayers pay their rightful tax, smuggling is decreased and there is less collusion to defraud the Revenue Authority.

Personal and professional development have always been encouraged and supported at the Authority. The very nature of the job demands skilled and knowledgeable people who are committed to the task of tax administration in a transparent and accountable manner, and was one of the philosophies behind the merger of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Departments under the Authority's umbrella body.

Reflecting on the Guyana Revenue Authority over the past nineteen years takes me back to my early years as a junior officer in the then Inland Revenue Department when I joined the organisation in November 1971. To return and help in its restructuring has been nothing but toil, pain and sacrifice. However, the gains made have been satisfying and I am thankful to be the head of the institution that was responsible for my growth and personal development. When I returned in July 2016 my plan entailed the Authority avoiding the pitfalls and building on the gains of my predecessors. This, the Authority certainly did with the help of certain international agencies, the Tax Reform Committee Report of 2016, together with the help, support and co-operation of the Minister of Finance and the Governing Board. Ours have been a work in progress which will certainly continue in the future years.

The outlived TRIPS has been replaced with a new application software, the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). This modern Customs' solution, together with Post Clearance Controls, advance cargo manifests, the Trusted Trader and the adoption of the Harmonised Classification System will enable the Authority to meet multiple objectives, among them being international trade facilitation and enhanced revenue collection. The scanning of containers for export is being facilitated on a daily basis at the GNIC Container Scanning Site, and this will be further complemented in mid-2019 by a permanent fixed scanner. Further, it is envisaged that the Internal Revenue aspect of TRIPS will be replaced in 2019, thereby allowing for a 'state of the art' IT system which will see the Authority realise one of its foremost goals of having a common database which will enable the administration of the taxation "360 degree" cycle.

The GRA's "3-Year" Strategic Plan, which will be unveiled during our Anniversary celebrations, will guide the Authority towards succession, headquarters and operational planning well into the mid-2020's. The Oil and Gas Unit, already established through help from the US Office of Technical Assistance, will be spun off from the Large Taxpayers Unit, and, with the help from the IMF and British Technical Assistance, will be staffed with officers competent in the Audit and Review of PSAs and petroleum operations. Our branch offices, including the expanded Bartica Office and the one newly established at Mabaruma, will provide all services offered in Georgetown through data linkages, while those planned for other locations will continue apace during 2019 and 2020, thereby allowing taxpayers to meet their tax obligations with minimal effort, cost and delay.

Training continues apace and the Inspector of Taxes Training Programme has been reinvigorated to improve the functional skills of officers. Employees are now being appraised through our new performance appraisal system that was established with the help of CARTAC, and will see the end of "bunching" and the re-introduction of staff increments. Modernisation and the fair and transparent administration of revenue laws are high on the agenda; today our customers, the taxpaying public, can submit tax returns from the comfort of their homes, and very soon with the introduction of the Electronic Single Window System, trade facilitation will be possible with a single website visit.

I have tried to do my part to the best of my abilities. However, the task ahead requires the collective effort of all stakeholders for it to be successful. My hope is that the sense of optimism, drive and determination I feel, is felt across the Authority. As the famous saying goes, "No man is an island, no man stands alone." Everyone in and out of the Authority, from the Deputy Commissioners to the clerical staff and the taxpayer, who has a social contract with the State, must put their shoulders to the wheel.

**Mr. Godfrey Statia**

Commissioner - General