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*Chambers*

*Director of Public Prosecutions,  
P.O. Box 1031,  
Georgetown,  
Guyana*

29<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

DPP's Chambers Press Release - Region 9 Public Awareness Outreach by DPP's Chambers and Chancellor's Office

Region Nine Schools' Welfare Officer Matthais Thomas has emphatically questioned the preparedness of residents of that Region to change their mind set and to speak out against the social ills of Domestic Violence including Sexual Violence that continue to plague their communities.

His piercing question was made during a Public Awareness Outreach held by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) led by Madam DPP, Mrs. Shalimar Ali-Hack, SC and the Chancellor of the Judiciary Office headed by Chancellor, Madam Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards on April 23 and 24, 2024 at Nappi Village, Central Rupununi.

Other Meetings were also held at the Sand Creek Secondary School, Sand Creek Multi-Purpose Centre and the Shulinab Village Benab, South Rupununi.

Thomas was in support of a clarion call made by the DPP for residents of Nappi and by extension, other communities of Region 9, to speak out against the several abuses that confront them, including Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse, Abuse of Alcohol and Use of Marijuana and Cocaine.

"Are you prepared to change your mind set and speak out," the Welfare Officer questioned his fellow residents in response to the DPP's plea for them to say NO to the abuses, "***you must say 'no' you must speak out,***" DPP pleaded.

Specifically, on Sexual Offences, there are challenges faced to get complainants and their parents to come forward to make reports to the police and to give testimony in Court. One resident opined that in such cases, the family of the victims come under severe pressure from other family members or members of the community not to pursue the matters.

Over the recent years, the Guyana Police Force's Region 9 Division has forwarded several police files to the DPP's Chambers for legal advice on sexual offences. For this year from January to

April there are 14 files for Rape, Sexual Activity with A Child under 16 and Sexual Activity with A Child Family Member, which is the prevalent complaint from Region 9. In 2023, the DPP's Chambers received and gave legal advice in 49 such police files and in 2022, 41 such files were received from the Region.

Other offences plaguing the Region 9 community include *Murder, Causing Death by Dangerous Driving, Break and Enter and Larceny, Possession of Firearms, Assault Causing Actual Bodily Harm and Felonious Wounding and Disorderly Behaviour*.

Some of these matters are already before the Magistrate's Court and High Court. The police are continuing to investigate others.

Residents also spoke of Domestic Violence and granting of bail by the courts to abusers who would return to the villages and cause fear to the victims. However, Chancellor Madam Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards informed and urged them to make applications to the Magistrates' Court for Protection Order and Restraining Order against the perpetrators.

During the 2-day Outreach, Madam Chancellor focused on scouting new areas where additional magistrates' courts can be established in Region 9. This initiative is aimed to alleviate the difficulties faced by residents who travel vast expanse of lands to attend Magistrate Courts presently located in Central Lethem, Annai, Karasabai and Ishalton.

Meanwhile, on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> April, a 5-member team of Amerindians from Regions 1, 2, 6 and 9 led by Women's Rights Activist Vanda Radzick met with the DPP's Office to make their concerns known about the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence offences in their respective communities.

The DPP's Office listened to their complaints and offered on the spot assistance where possible. The Chambers also highlighted the challenges it faces with getting complainants to testify in court when matters are set for trial before judge and jury in the High Courts. The team acknowledged those challenges.

The team thanked the DPP's Chambers for facilitating them and expressed their gratitude and satisfaction on the responses to their concerns from the DPP's Chambers.