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Guyana among largest global participants in efforts against gender-based, child-directed violence

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The Margaret Clemons Foundation (MCF) today rolled out the first phase of its Inside Out Witness Project, which aims to draw attention to and spark conversation about the effects of adult human behaviour, particularly gender based and child directed violence on society's most vulnerable and impressionable witnesses, children. Ministers of Human Services and Social Security and Education, Jennifer Webster and Priya Manickchand respectively today joined 15 Guyanese children, US Ambassador Brendt Hardt and Canadian High Commissioner, David Devine, and several volunteers as they lined the sea walls at Turkeyen with artwork depicting the human eyes, symbolising the firm stance to ensure that abuse and violence against children and women, do not go unnoticed.

Minister Manickchand in a brief comment emphasised that in their actions, adults need to be more conscious of the fact that children are witnessing everything, both good and bad, that is happening in society so as to ensure that negative and harmful behavioural patterns are not imparted to them. She expressed the hope that this initiative would engender need for Guyanese to start talking about the effects of negative behaviour on children, particularly as it relates to domestic violence. Meanwhile, Minister Webster said that project uses art to highlight the need to rid society of abuse and violence.

"Recently we have had a number of reported cases of sexual molestation of our children and it's an area of concern; we are going to work in every possible way we can to sensitise the populace and to work along with other programmes so that reduce occurrences of this nature," she said. Clemmons, who is spearheading this project, said that this art project comes with a message, which is, "children are the most vulnerable and impressionable witnesses to violence."

The project is part of the global photography project by the French artist JR called "Inside Out". MCF provided each of the 18 participants with point and shoot cameras, memory cards, journals and photography books. Clemmons said that Guyana has turned to be one of the largest global participants in the effort against gender-based and child-directed violence. In August 2011, the Human Services Ministry partnered with the MCF to host a photography workshop for 15 children and two artists under the project theme name WITNESS.

The MCF is a New York based non-profit organisation with a mission to stop violence against women and children through the arts. The posters will be plastered at 15 sites around Georgetown including: the National Library, Nations Schools, US Embassy, Canadian High