



REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

STATEMENT

BY

**MRS. YVONNE PEARSON
MEMBER OF THE GUYANA DELEGATION
AND
CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL TOSHAOS COUNCIL**

**BEFORE THE PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

ON AGENDA ITEM 4

MAY 19, 2011

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Madam Chairperson,

The Guyana delegation is honoured to join the discussion on the issue before us and in so doing extend our congratulations to you Madam Chairperson and the newly elected members of the Permanent Forum. Guyana is particularly pleased at the election of Mr. Berti Xavier a national of our country and the first person from the English speaking Caribbean to serve on this body. We are confident that Mr. Xavier will be able to contribute to the work of the Forum given his wide experience as a serving Chief of the Macushi community and knowledge of the issues before us.

Madam Chairperson,

The Amerindians, the indigenous peoples of Guyana, are an integral part of Guyanese society. As such the Government of Guyana has redoubled efforts to address issues affecting us in order to overcome centuries of marginalization. Apart from improved access to education and health, attention is also being focused on boosting economic activity in communities through the Livelihoods Programme, which has contributed to the resuscitation of rural agriculture, the provision of employment and also to addressing food security.

The Constitution of Guyana guarantees the equality of all citizens, including Amerindians. The revision of the Amerindian Act in 2006 is a tangible manifestation of this obligation. Among its many aspects the Act recognizes the linkage between the spiritual wellbeing, identity and sustainable livelihood of indigenous peoples and their connection to land. The Government of Guyana recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to ownership of land which is "absolute and forever." Moreover, there are ongoing training programmes and awareness sessions to enhance the knowledge of indigenous peoples of their human rights, which is critical to our participation in decision making and to upholding the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Based on our knowledge of our rights and the global climate change situation, our

indigenous peoples have been able to contribute significantly to the development of the Low Carbon Development Strategy in Guyana. In fact, Amerindians are not threatened by this national strategy but rather view it as tool to better manage our lands and resources.

The promotion and protection of the rights of Amerindians in Guyana is supported by varying mechanisms including a Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, the National Toshias Council and the Indigenous Peoples Commission. These mechanisms have distinct responsibilities to enhance the status of indigenous peoples and respond to their legitimate demands and needs. While significant progress is being made on indigenous issues in Guyana, we nevertheless hasten to underscore that more needs to be done for the Amerindians in Guyana. We fully anticipate that the current Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People will contribute to accelerating progress in addressing issues of concern to indigenous peoples worldwide. This Forum has a pivotal role to play in focusing attention and encouraging action towards these ends.

I thank you.