

**Permanent Mission of the Republic of Guyana to
the United Nations**

doCin
ARCHIVES

STATEMENT

by

**Ms. Donnette C. Critchlow
Representative of the Republic of Guyana**

**Before the Second Session of the
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

on

Agenda Item 4© - HEALTH

United Nations Headquarters, New York

May 19, 2003

Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

It is an honour for the delegation of Guyana to join in this discourse of the Permanent Forum and specifically to address the issue of the health of the indigenous people of our country. In so doing, permit me to congratulate you and the other members of the Permanent Forum on your election which we view as vital in the continued and consistent guidance of the work of this important body.

In a multi-racial society such as ours, which is striving to achieve economic and social development, social cohesion based on the equality of all citizens, is imperative. As a consequence, like all other citizens, Amerindians are entitled to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms under the Constitution of Guyana. These include the right to quality education and adequate health services. Indeed Amerindians, like women, children and the elderly constitute the vulnerable in Guyanese society and it is for this reason that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper places appropriate emphasis on the constraints faced by these groups and their future development. Amerindians are also accorded special protections under a separate Amerindian Act which was passed in 1976, containing provisions on the governance of Amerindian Communities including issues such as land rights, the Powers of Minister of Amerindian Affairs, the Powers of Captains and the Village Council. This Act is currently being revised through a process of broad-based consultations, specifically with the indigenous peoples and interested parties. It is anticipated that the revised Act should be tabled in Parliament by July of this year.

There have been laudable achievements in the further integration of Amerindians into the mainstream of Guyanese society and currently they are among the professionals holding positions such as doctors, teachers, nurses and journalists. The bold initiative of the appointment of a Minister of Amerindian Affairs, as well as the combined representation of 15 Amerindians in the 65 seat National Assembly has added to their participation in decision making at a very high level. Further, the annual celebration of Amerindian Heritage Month provides an excellent opportunity for greater understanding of both the history and expression of the culture of the first peoples of Guyana.

The fact that some degree of progress has been achieved is by no means indicative of a life free of challenges for the Amerindians of Guyana. As a small developing country with economic constraints, including debt servicing commitments and volatile terms of trade, there are limitations with regard to government expenditure on social services. The health sector in Guyana faces particular challenges in the delivery of health services, a situation which is exacerbated in the case of the Amerindians due to their dispersed settlement pattern, the difficult terrain and the high cost of administering projects in the interior locations of Guyana. Notwithstanding, the Government is working to overcome these challenges and has incrementally established community health centres and health huts to offer residents of hinterland communities immunisation, maternal and child health services and education as well as the identification and treatment of malaria. These health care services are sustained through the training of residents of these communities to fill vacancies such as Community Health Workers and Medexes. UNICEF has been very instrumental in improving the immunization of Amerindian children in Guyana, and even though the Government of Guyana/UNICEF immunization programme has concluded, the presentation of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization Award to Guyana in 2000 provides much needed support for the continuation of our immunization programme until 2005.

Water and sanitation are also integral components to the health of communities. As such wells are being dug and sanitation facilities provided to ensure the maintenance of adequate health standards. A report of the World Water Council recently ranked Guyana fifth on the Water Poverty Index based on access, use and capacity to provide good quality water. The involvement of communities in such development activities are encouraging and last March two Amerindian students formed part of Guyana's delegation to the Third World Water Forum, and participated in the Children's Water and Sanitation Conference.

Let me reiterate the commitment of the Government of Guyana in the provision of adequate health services to all Guyanese. The achievements made so far are a direct result of the policies implemented, consistent lobbying efforts and the

participation of the communities concerned. The delegation of Guyana recognises the importance of the Permanent Forum in providing expert advice to ECOSOC, and looks forward to the dialogue of delegations, members of the Forum and NGOs in charting the way forward. The sharing of experiences is also useful in gaining more information on best practices in the issues before us. Permit me in closing to express my Government's fullest support for the dedication of another International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

I thank you.