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**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Statement by H.E. Henry Mac Donald
Permanent Representative of Suriname to the United Nations
on the occasion of the
7th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Tuesday 22 April 2008 in New York**

Madam Chair,

I am pleased to participate in the general debate of this 7th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and express the hope that this session will have a constructive dialogue on an issue of which the international community is currently seized with. It is therefore opportune for the Permanent Forum to focus its discussions this session on the issue of: *"Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges"*.

The international community, faced with the imminent threat posed by climate change, is currently engaged in attempts to seek to turn the tide of a possible devastating impact of current trends on planet earth, human population and other forms of life on earth.

We concur with the observations that indigenous peoples, who are often the most marginalized and impoverished peoples, will be disproportionately affected by climate change, posing a threat to their very survival due to their close relationship with the environment. This situation negatively effects the enjoyment of human rights and we believe that the international community should embark on the difficult exercise to consider this issue in the context of human rights whereby bringing a human face to the debate.

Discussing the human dimensions of climate change by putting people at the centre of the debate, will place the focus on how climate change affects the lives of human beings in general, and women, children and indigenous people in particular.

Even though indigenous people contribute the least to the deteriorating conditions on planet earth, we have to realize that they can play an undeniable role in the efforts to stem the tide of this phenomenon. We have to bear in mind that long before the international political and scientific consensus on the devastating effects of climate change, indigenous people with their traditional knowledge, learned how to cope with changing conditions, and moreover changing weather conditions. They can certainly guide us to making informed decisions on mitigation and adaptation. It is of importance to not only view the indigenous and local communities as victims but more so as valuable agents of change.

Madam Chair,

Often times we referred to Suriname as a blessed country where we do not experience hurricanes and other severe weather conditions. We were hit with a dose of reality when in 2006 we experienced the worst flooding ever, whereby half of the country was inundated and all the living areas of the indigenous and tribal communities in the affected areas were damaged.

Suffice to say that this natural disaster created major difficulties with regard to displacement of many indigenous people living on the land, access to food and potable water and challenged the national achievement of the internationally development goals, including the millennium development goals.

Madam Chair,

The international community can not ignore that the increasing demands of our production and consumption patterns, and more importantly in the developed countries, is jeopardizing the very existence of all live on planet earth. Greater involvement of all stakeholders, and more importantly the indigenous peoples is indispensable in the global efforts to address the many challenges associated with changing weather patterns, increase in sea level rise, draughts, floods, etc.

The Surinamese Government is aware of its responsibility to consult all of its citizens when formulating and implementing plans and programmes to deal with the sustainable economic and social development of the country.

In closing Madam Chair, Suriname is pleased to note the historic adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in September last year. Suriname places great importance to the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and based on that conviction the Government decided to respond positively to the Declaration.

We recognize this document as a political document, to express and demonstrate the goodwill of States to the promotion and protection of all human rights and as a reference document on international indigenous people's issues.

I thank you.