



S T A T E M E N T

BY THE

**HONOURABLE PAULINE SUKHAI, M.P.
MINISTER OF AMERINDIAN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

**AT THE
ELEVENTH SESSION
PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for permitting me the floor to make this brief intervention. I wish to join others in congratulating you on your election to the Chairmanship. I also wish to bring greetings to representatives of member states and all gathered here at this important forum.

With regards to the dialogue on the Doctrine of Discovery and its enduring impact and the right to redress, it is without a doubt that the effects and impacts of colonialism and its concomitant dominance, dispossession and plunder have had severe impact on countries that were victims to the system. No country has had a history of smooth transition from colonialism and its dominance.

Guyana is one such country that did not escape colonialism and its impacts; the earlier post-independence period offered little consolation in addressing indigenous people's rights. It was against this backdrop that Guyana, a multi-ethnic society and a home to approximately 70,000 indigenous peoples, took on the challenges of ensuring that issues regarding indigenous people's are mainstreamed into the national development priorities, thereby providing a solid platform for indigenous peoples to participate at all levels of national development and to self-govern village current and future developments.

Of the countries that ratified the UN DRIP to date, only some countries have exercised the political will to ensure that the principles of UNDRIP are embodied in national constitutions and legislation. Indigenous peoples' rights are well entrenched in Guyana's national constitution which are operationalized by the Amerindian Act of 2006. The Act provides for land rights, for management of resources, self-governance among other aspects of indigenous livelihood. The constitutional and legislative provisions are in

many ways, aligned with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous peoples are also represented by institutions established and well placed to further foster the wellbeing of indigenous peoples' development. The Indigenous Peoples Commission and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, both of which have the mandate to propose policies on Amerindian welfare; The National Toshias Council (NTC) which is an independent body comprised of elected Village leaders (Toshias) that participate in decision-making on matters affecting Amerindian Villages.

While Indigenous peoples in some countries have been dispossessed and continue to struggle for rights to lands and resources, Guyana national laws allow for granting of legal titles to lands, and it makes provision for land demarcation and extensions to strengthen tenure security. Guyana, however, is not blinded by our progress and it recognizes that there is much to be done, to further enhance indigenous priorities into the national development processes.

Therefore, Guyana stands in solidarity with our indigenous brothers and sisters of other countries who continue to struggle for recognition, rights to land and resources, and right to redress. From our country's experience, we believe it is possible for Governments to support and promote the enabling environment for the protection and promotion of indigenous people's rights, and to this end would recommend swift action during the current Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

I thank you.