



STATEMENT

BY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE TO THE
UNITED NATIONS**

**ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY
(CARICOM)**

**TO THE SECOND SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

ON

AGENDA ITEM 4F: EDUCATION

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**PERMANENT MISSION OF BELIZE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies
Members of the Permanent Forum
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the 14 Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are members of the United Nations, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, The Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country Belize. We congratulate you and the other members of the Forum on your re-election, it is important work that we are doing here and this will be greatly enhanced by your leadership.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM sees itself playing an important role in the development of the world's indigenous peoples. We are aware that they are our first inhabitants; their traditions and understanding of the harmony between our lives and the environment have taught us how to better appreciate the gifts of nature. This is a small part of the contributions they have made and continues to make towards sustainable development. We therefore realize the importance of strengthening the human and institutional capacities of indigenous people to allow them to better participate in the decision making process. We remain committed to ensuring that our countries protect and improve the quality of life of our indigenous peoples, especially the children who in many of our societies are among those with less access to education, proper health care and a better environment in which to grow up. Our indigenous populations are small and concentrated in only a few of the countries in our region. Accordingly they are among the most vulnerable and we must ensure that they too benefit from any advancement in our national development.

Two years ago the Government of Belize signed a historic agreement with the community leaders representing the Maya of Southern Belize. This agreement recognizes the right of the Maya to the resources of the area and is based on their longstanding use and enjoyment. The agreement resulted in a partnership between the government and the Maya Communities to co manage the natural resources of protected areas. Currently the Government in consultation with the leaders of the Maya Community is implementing its National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan and as a result has built schools, provide access to technology and assisted with programmes to protect and preserve the environment and bringing development to our indigenous communities while respecting and preserving their cultural values.

In addition the Government of Belize, in close consultation with the Maya and other indigenous communities in the southern part of the country, developed a draft Regional Development Plan for the South of Belize, and we welcome the Inter-American

Development Bank's interest in assisting with the implementation of the development programmes outlined in the plan.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Guyana has consistently accorded high priority to the education of its nationals and as other Heads of Government has reaffirmed its commitment to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals as well as those concerning Education For All. In this regard, several initiatives have been undertaken with a view to improving the quality of education offered to students of the hinterland communities, through the Primary Education Improvement Programme, the Secondary School Reform Programme and the Guyana Basic Education Training Programme. These programmes have largely provided for the construction and or rehabilitation of educational facilities, and curriculum development. In addition the Guyana Basic Education Training Programme has been geared towards providing the necessary foundation for teachers of hinterland communities to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills.

Emphasis is being placed on the teaching of nursery and primary school students in the language spoken by their particular community. Already Amerindian children are being taught in Wapishana and Arawak and earlier this year, the Makushi Language Project was launched in the Rupununi. Amerindian children are encouraged to remain in schools beyond the primary level and under the Hinterland Scholarship Programme are afforded the opportunity to pursue secondary education.

The Government of Guyana is fully cognizant that the number of Amerindians who graduate from the University of Guyana is in the minority. In this context the Government took the initiative last September to award 10 Amerindian students with government scholarships to pursue under-graduate studies overseas in the fields of medicine and engineering.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica established the Department of Carib Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister in 2000. This historic development has given a heightened level of urgency to the issues confronting Dominica's indigenous Caribs.

Last year, Dominica's Government commissioned a participatory integrated planning process for the Carib Territory focused on sustainable agriculture, education, economic development, tourism and cultural recuperation. The European Union and the Caribbean Development Bank have already expressed their considerable interest in providing resources for the realization of the objectives of the plan.

In the last three years, the Dominica Government has launched a major initiative towards increasing the number of Carib students attending university programs. A Carib Education Task Force, which serves as government's counterpart in educational

development, has underscored the importance of the Territory's inclusion in the digital divide.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM's commitment to the development and integration of indigenous peoples into our development agenda is unquestionable, we have instituted policies and included their participation in the decision making process to ensure that their customs are taken into consideration in the sustainable development of our natural resources. We are aware of the tremendous contributions and sacrifices they have made towards our national development, and remain committed to ensuring that our countries protect and improve the quality of life of our indigenous peoples.

Thank you.