

51st Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Annual half day panel discussion on the rights of Indigenous peoples
Theme: Impact of social and economic recovery plans in the COVID-19
context on indigenous peoples, with a special focus on food security
28th September 2022

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be given this opportunity this morning to share a few moments with you albeit virtually. Guyana is currently recognizing our 'Indigenous people' in a month-long celebration in September, so this theme is especially timely.

One of the basic human rights is the right to an adequate standard of living. The Government of Guyana is obligated, as all States are, to pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's access to and utilization of resources, and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security.

Food security of the nation, inclusive of indigenous people, have been challenged by the impact of COVID-19 which has resulted in slower economic development in many indigenous communities. The situation has been further exacerbated by the rising cost of living which has been an impact of the Russia-Ukraine war. Also, many of the indigenous communities in Guyana are located in agriculture areas that were impacted by a devastating flood in 2021 which significantly impacted the livelihood of many farmers.

To alleviate the impact of these challenges for all its citizens, including the indigenous people the Government of Guyana has distributed multiple cash grants, of which our indigenous people in riverain and hinterland communities received GYD \$1.2 Billion GYD.

The Ministry of Agriculture has initiated food security programmes and projects for the indigenous people with focus on input supply to distribute agricultural inputs and equipment,

expanded water harvesting/irrigation ponds, boosted agriculture extension, establish agro-processing facilities and marketing services in indigenous communities.

In 2022, our government has initiated better engagements between the leaders of the country's indigenous peoples through the National Toshias Council Conference, this allowed for Indigenous leaders to identified issues affecting their communities. This resulted in a special allocation of \$3 Billion GYD to provide solutions, many of them which were food and agriculture in nature.

Furthermore, the National School Feeding Programme specifically targets our indigenous communities in the hinterland and riverine areas, to increase students' attendance and to provide a market for farmers' produce. This is approximately \$2 Billion GYD allocation per year to address the nutritional intake of young children, and improving their attentiveness during classes.

To build livelihood resilience and focus on food and nutrition security, the Government of Guyana with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is presently implementing the *Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agricultural Development Project* with a budget of GYD \$2.3 Billion. This provides access to funding to indigenous villages for public goods and assets.

While these actions have proven to reduce the impacts of COVID-19 on the vulnerable populations, the Government of Guyana is still working assiduously to further improve the livelihoods of indigenous peoples to ensure food security. As Governments, let us work to ensure that we make life easier for our indigenous peoples and stand up for their human rights.

Thank you.