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Statement by

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of the
Republic of Suriname



on the occasion of the
World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

Roundtable 2:
Implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples at the national and local level

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Mr. Chairman,

Indigenous Peoples constitute 3% of the population of the Republic of Suriname and are divided over 4 distinct tribes. In addition our tribal and forest dependent population consists of 6 tribes of Maroons, the descendants of Africans, who freed themselves from slavery during colonial times, representing approximately 10% of the population. They established communities in the hinterland of Suriname based on their respective African and Amerindian customs and traditions.

The Government of Suriname reaffirms its support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its core principles, in particular the principle of non-discrimination.

Suriname's adherence to non-discrimination and equality is based on the very fabric of our diverse multi-ethnic society. These principles are solidly embedded in our Constitution.

The mosaic of the Surinamese population is reflected in the rich diversity of indigenous peoples, descendants of immigrants from India, Indonesia, China, the Netherlands as well as descendants of African slaves.

Respect for cultural diversity and peaceful co-existence are distinct characteristics of the Surinamese society. I can proudly share with you that Suriname can be considered as the country with the most diverse ethnic and linguistic population of the South American continent.

I wish to note that the current Government has placed the issue of the recognition of the collective rights of our indigenous and tribal peoples high on its agenda. In the National Development Plan 2012-2016 the Government commits itself to exert all efforts to address the matter of land demarcation for our indigenous and tribal peoples.

In this respect reference can be made to the appointment of a Special Presidential Commissioner on Land Rights, a descendant of tribal origin himself. His experience and knowledge of the tribal communities contributes to furthering national policy on an issue that has occupied the agenda of many consecutive Governments in Suriname.

With respect to the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples 2 conferences were convened in 2010 and 2011. These conferences discussed a broad array of issues, in particular land rights and mechanisms for consultation.

Efforts are underway to further dialogue with our indigenous and tribal peoples on various matters affecting them. A cooperative approach with all stakeholders, including the non-tribal population, in this regard is crucial to arrive at satisfactory and necessary solutions.

Consultation and cooperation with indigenous and tribal peoples is valued by the Government to safeguarding their involvement in the formulation of public policies. I wish to note one particular example recently that after consultations with indigenous and tribal peoples the President of Suriname decided to defer, until further notice, the execution of a major project in the lands and territories of indigenous and tribal peoples.

We recognize that consultation is important for ensuring broad-based support and creating a collaborative environment of mutual trust.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to guaranteeing the right to quality education for our youngsters from indigenous and tribal origin, I can refer to measures that are being implemented such as: construction of new schools, training for qualified educators to be deployed in the interior, providing incentives to teachers to take up jobs in the interior and the evaluation of region-specific and culturally sensitive curricula.

For higher educational courses – secondary school and high school courses – an educational centre, a campus especially for the children of the interior is set up 40 kms from our capital Paramaribo.

Regarding the equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health I wish to note the efforts of successive Governments, in particular through construction of several medical centers in the interior as well as improving the capacity of health personnel and infrastructure.

It is also worth noting that legislation has been drafted to recognize the traditional authorities of our indigenous and tribal peoples. Currently a process of consultations is underway to review and to possibly embark upon relevant amendments to said draft legislation.

Suriname has also proclaimed the 9th of August as an Official Holiday in recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname and to reflect on the advances achieved thus far. And each year on the 10th of October we celebrate through rich cultural activities the signing of the Peace Treaties in the second half of the 18th century with the maroons (tribal peoples).

In closing,

Permit me to state that Government of Suriname remains committed to take all necessary measures to ensure the involvement and full and effective participation of its indigenous and tribal peoples in all matters affecting them.

We are convinced that a climate of confidence with our indigenous and tribal peoples is our only avenue allowing for a productive dialogue and ensuring that the rights of the members of these communities are upheld and respected.

Thank you for your attention.