



REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

**STATEMENT
BY
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ON
AGENDA ITEM 66:
RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank the Secretary General for his report before the Committee on this agenda item.

Guyana aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Belize on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). My delegation wishes to make a few remarks in our national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Guyana continues to focus on the development of its indigenous peoples in accordance with the promotion of good practices as detailed in the Secretary General's report contained in document A/68/317. Article 149G of the Constitution of Guyana states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to the protection, preservation and promulgation of their language, cultural heritage and way of life".

The Government of Guyana's undertaking to strengthen its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its implementation are reflected in three main policies of Guyana's national development agenda namely: the Low Carbon Development Strategy; the Poverty

Reduction Strategy; and the National Competitiveness Strategy. The Indigenous Peoples' Commission and the Ethnic Relations Commission offer direct opportunities for Amerindians to have recourse to addressing discrimination and rights issues affecting them.

Guyana's track record of inclusionary governance also allows for a high level of participation of indigenous peoples. The most recent embodiment of engagement is represented at the multi stakeholder consultations on the updating of the LCDs which aims to transform Guyana's economy while combating climate change.

The next major step for Amerindians is continued discussions on the approval of an "opt-in mechanism" to establish guidelines for villages to choose whether to opt-in or opt-out" of the strategy within the framework of the LCDs, essentially committing their forests to a REDD+ Agreement with the Government and in return receiving payments which will be allocated to further Amerindian development.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to land titling and demarcation, the Amerindian Act No. 6 of 2006 provides full recognition to Amerindian rights to ownership and titling to land. Today, of the 110 existing Amerindian communities, 98 have been titled and awarded absolute grants and 77 of those are demarcated. The 2013 budget allocated G\$77.8 million for titling of 12 communities and the demarcation of 8 titled villages.

In respect of extractive industries, the Special Rapporteur has indicated that a preferred model for resource extraction and development should be through indigenous peoples' own initiatives and enterprises. In Guyana, indigenous peoples retain the authority to make decisions and grant approval as is stipulated by law with respect to mining. Village councils also hold veto powers over small and medium scale gold mining. The Government continues to provide support to the indigenous peoples by offering advice when negotiating agreements with investors interested in establishing operations on village lands.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the many logistical challenges, education remains one of our national priorities, especially for the children of the hinterland regions where the majority of our indigenous population resides. Over the years several initiatives such as the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) and the School Feeding Programme (SFP) have been implemented to improve the quality of education provided to our indigenous children. Also in keeping with Art.15 of the United

Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports has undertaken to complete a project for the compilation of dictionaries and short story narratives of the nine indigenous languages of Guyana.

Mr. Chairman,

In spite of the acceleration to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, much work still remains in areas of human rights and indigenous peoples as they undergo various types of discrimination in parts of the world. Guyana welcomes the convening of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in 2014, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. It is envisaged that this forum will contribute to the sharing of perspectives and best practices on the realization of the rights of our indigenous peoples.

In conclusion, there is still much work to be done as we strive to empower indigenous peoples, strengthen their economies and societies within a structured national development framework. It is therefore important that an indigenous perspective, based on culture and identity, be adequately reflected in the post 2015 development agenda.

I thank you.