

Guiana Shield Regional Meeting Indigenous Peoples, Infrastructure, Mining and Climate Change

Guiana Shield Resolution on Climate Change and REDD Friday April 17, 2009

We, the indigenous peoples' representatives of the Guiana Shield countries Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana, have come together here in Georgetown, Guyana, from 13 – 17 April 2009 to deliberate on major issues affecting us, especially those related to IIRSA, Mining, Climate Change and REDD. On the issues of Climate Change and REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests) we declare the following:

Whereas we, the indigenous peoples, have a long lasting relationship with the land and the natural environment;

Whereas forests for us indigenous peoples, have more and higher values, including spiritual and cultural values, than just as a natural resource, because they form part of our daily lives, subsistence, cultures and spirituality;

Whereas we, indigenous peoples, have been managing our lands and natural resources over many centuries in a sustainable manner, as evidenced by the fact that remaining forests are to be found not coincidentally in indigenous peoples' territories, and whereas we are the only true guardians of our environment, forests, biodiversity and natural resources;

Whereas we, indigenous peoples, have traditional knowledge, expertise and experiences gathered over centuries and over many generations on sustainable management practices, conservation and sustainable use of our environment and natural resources, and which we may wish to use to demonstrate, advise and provide strategies to the governments and other decision-makers on conservation and the proper use of our natural resources;

Whereas we have not been included yet in a meaningful manner in the national and international discussions, policy-making and decision-taking on issues related to climate change, mitigation and adaptation measures even though our communities and our peoples are directly dependent on the natural environment and are in a much more vulnerable situation if it comes to climate change, as has been shown already by the many incidences of flooding, drought, changes in seasons and changes in flora and fauna, directly affecting our livelihoods, food security and even survival;

Whereas we are only called upon at short notice to participate in major discussions affecting us, and we are given the opportunity to only participate in inappropriate consultation processes that do not follow the internationally accepted principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and other principles of good governance;

Whereas we have never shared equally and in a just manner in the benefits arising from the utilization by others of the lands and resources that historically

And whereas our rights as indigenous peoples, laid down in human rights' instruments and explicitly in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which has also been supported by the Governments of Guyana, Suriname and France, continue to be violated, disrespected or neglected;

We therefore resolve:

1. The global community, and in particular the Governments of Guyana, Suriname and France, must explicitly recognize indigenous peoples as rights-holders in all climate change discussions, not merely stakeholders
2. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must be fully respected by governments, private sector, NGOs, international donor organizations, financial institutions and other actors
3. Particularly, all actors must respect the land rights of indigenous peoples, the necessary integrity of our territories and the unbreakable relation between our land rights and our existence; furthermore our right to self-determination and to decide over our own course and means of development; and our right to fully and effectively participate in all matters affecting us through processes that respect the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)
4. All actors must recognize and act accordingly, that forests are not merely tradable commodities in climate change and/or carbon schemes but represent other, higher values to indigenous peoples who have cared for and maintained such forests over many centuries. We will simply not allow any REDD or other scheme that violates our rights and interests
5. Much more information-sharing and capacity strengthening on the complex issues of climate change, REDD, financial facilities and funds, and the governance mechanisms around such mechanisms and funds, are urgently needed at all levels and in varying degrees. Financial resources must be provided to our organizations as a matter of priority, in order to educate and strengthen the capacity of our peoples and communities, to be able to participate effectively and take informed decisions
6. Legal regulatory frameworks on forest management must be reviewed and/or reinforced as necessary, more strongly recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples and our role in managing, monitoring and enforcing regulations related to forests
7. Further legislation and common norms must be developed for the protection of forests and for compensation schemes, such with full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and following FPIC principles.

Finally, we hereby emphasize and consolidate our unity as indigenous peoples of the Guiana Shield region and reiterate our determination to work together and strengthen our collaborative efforts also in matters related to climate change, REDD and other forest debates in which we are legitimate rights-holders.

Georgetown, April 17 2009