

[Extract from:
Indigenous peoples' rights, REDD and the draft Low Carbon Development Strategy (Guyana)
A summary report of a workshop held in the Regency Suites, Georgetown, 24–26 June 2009
Amerindian Peoples Association]

Workshop on indigenous peoples' rights, REDD and the draft Low Carbon Development Strategy (Guyana)

June 2009

Public statement of participants

After initial examination of the government's draft LCDS and the draft REDD plans, and following lengthy discussions over three days, we, the undersigned Amerindian leaders, elders and participants in this workshop, sponsored and facilitated by the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), wish to publicly state the following:

Noting that our lands and territories are being affected by climate change impacts that threaten our lands, livelihoods and way of life, and considering that the greater part of climate change pollution stems from industrialised countries, we call on governments to take major steps to cut industrial emissions of carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases.

Recognising that the indigenous peoples of Guyana are the historical guardians of the forest, we in principle support proposals that aim to protect the standing forest where these initiatives fully respect and secure our rights and value our traditional knowledge and practices.

In order to ensure that indigenous peoples' concerns, priorities and proposals are fully incorporated in national forest and climate policies and low carbon initiatives, we call on the government and international agencies and donors to ensure that all public consultations meet international standards and good practice principles. In particular, our peoples through their own representative institutions must be given adequate time for collective decision-making and space to reach internal agreements on our responses to the government's plans. We must not be pressured to make early decisions without full understanding of the implications of these policies for our forests, lands and livelihoods.

All public consultations must provide our communities with relevant information in the right format and languages, including information on both the possible benefits and the possible adverse impacts of the government's current plans. Issues raised by our leaders and communities must be fairly documented in the consultations, and their concerns and proposals must influence the final documents.

In addition, to ensure that REDD and LCDS policies and initiatives in Guyana fully uphold our rights and deliver equitable benefits for indigenous communities, we hereby recommend that:

- All policies are developed and actions carried out with full recognition of and respect for indigenous peoples' rights in accordance with international norms, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and related human rights instruments.
- Outstanding land and territorial issues identified in the Amerindian Lands Commission report of 1969 must be dealt with up-front as an integral part of policy design and implementation.
- An independent body comprising indigenous leaders and elders must be established to address and deal with outstanding territorial land claims. Such an entity can be an advisory body to the National Toshias Council.

- A moratorium on mining and industrial logging must be put in place in all fragile environments, including watersheds, and river and creek heads in both forest and non-forest areas.
- Large-scale industrial farming and aquaculture on fragile, non-forest land in savannah, mountain and wetland areas must not be promoted.
- Proposed hydro-dam projects must fully respect indigenous peoples' rights in accordance with international law and must meet standards established by the World Commission on Dams (WCD).
- Priority should be given to support for community-based farming and other sustainable development activities in savannah and forest areas.
- Participatory revision of the Amerindian Act of 2006 be carried out as soon as possible to strengthen its provisions so that they are fully consistent with international standards, particularly its provisions dealing with land demarcation, titling and extensions; and the responsibilities of government agencies to uphold our rights, including our right to free, prior and informed consent.
- The Forest Act 2009 and the forthcoming Protected Areas Act must fully respect our rights, including our customary rights to land and resources.
- Our rotational farming must not be classified as 'deforestation' nor 'degradation' and this sustainable traditional land-use practice must be fully safeguarded in any national LCDS/REDD programme.
- The global community and the Government of Guyana must explicitly recognise indigenous peoples as rights holders not merely stakeholders in all climate change discussions, policies and programmes.
- The historical stewardship role of indigenous peoples in protecting Guyana's forest on their traditional lands must be recognised and rewarded, including recognition and support for community conserved territories.
- Capacity building at the community and national levels must be carried out.
- Support and legal recognition of existing and future community-based mapping initiatives must be provided, including training of indigenous cartographers and other related technicians.
- Support and respect of indigenous governance and representative institutions at the local, regional, and national levels must be given in order to foster informed inputs to national policy-making on climate change, conservation and development.
- Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that no LCDS or REDD scheme may proceed on our traditional lands (titled and untitled) without our free, prior and informed consent.
- An indigenous peoples working group on REDD and the LCDS be established and recognised by government to assist and support informed and culturally appropriate consultations with Amerindian communities. Indigenous peoples must be able to choose their own representatives to take part in this working group.
- For our part, we commit to working to inform our communities and organisations of key rights, risks and opportunities relating to the LCDS/REDD issue. We aim to do this through the formation of teams involving our own people who are knowledgeable of our land use and way of life and who speak our languages.
- We call on donors and support organisations to provide adequate financial resources to carry out the aforementioned actions, including support for our own information dissemination and capacity-building efforts in our communities.
- We, the participants of this workshop, call on our Toshias and other representatives not to sign or endorse agreements on LCDS/REDD or related issues without the express prior consent of their home communities.

[Signatories' names and signatures are held with the APA]