

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of my people the Saamaka I greet you all. First of all I want to thank Mr. Goldman and his family and the entire staff and jury of the Goldman Environmental prize for selecting me and Head Captain Wanze as the 2009 prize winners for South America.

I also want to thank the Forest Peoples Programme, especially Mr. Fergus Mackay, who provided us technical support since 1997, including being our lawyer for more than 10 years as our case was heard by the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Our ancestors fought themselves free from slavery and established communities in the forest more than three centuries ago. They started living with and from the tropical rainforest and made the banks of the Upper Suriname River their home. From the 17th century until today, we have managed and controlled our territory according our own laws and customs in a sustainable way.

Our territory in Suriname is the only place that the Saamaka have to call home. It is the only place where we exist as a people, both territorially and culturally. We are obligated to protect it so that future generations of Saamaka can live there in freedom and in our way. That is why we fought against the logging companies sent by the government. They tried to destroy our forest, but we said no to that.

With the judgement of the IA-Court, our right to freely determine and pursue our development in accordance with our own aspirations and culture has been upheld. We want development without destroying our lands and our environment. Our rights to own, control and protect our traditional territory through our own institutions are also now recognised and guaranteed. These rights are fundamental to our survival.

We, Saamaka, have always protected our territory and we will continue to do so in accordance with our land tenure and management systems, which have evolved on the basis of our intimate knowledge of our territory as well as our deep spiritual and cultural connections to our lands.

We are now actively discussing watershed protection measures in the south of our territory and how we further develop holistic ecosystem protection measures in a way that also contributes to funding our community development initiatives.

This includes consideration of substantial forest conservation measures in a way that is grounded in our traditional management systems, but also benefits from interaction with outside techniques and ways of thinking. We know that the forests help the whole world as well as the Saamaka, and we will certainly be seeking support to further elaborate these measures in the near future.

Thank you.

S. Hugo Jabini