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We are writing to the European Commission and the Government of Guyana involved in the **Negotiations for a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the European Union (EU)**. In stark contrast to the six VPAs concluded to date, we have serious concerns about the absence of an inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder process in Guyana.

We welcome the EU's efforts to control illegal logging. The implementation of the EU FLEGT Action Plan shows the EU's dedication to improve forest governance worldwide. We also welcome the commitment of the Government of Guyana to strengthen forest governance through entering into a VPA with the EU, exemplifying the principles of sustainable and accountable forest management, forest legality, and sustainable development of forest resources.ⁱ This commitment is also part of the 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Guyana and Norway on climate funding for forests,ⁱⁱ and confirmed in the associated Joint Concept Note.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is therefore with keen interest that we are monitoring VPA developments in Guyana. We note that the Government of Guyana and the EU commenced formal negotiations in December 2012 with the view to concluding the VPA by September 2015.⁴ We see a fully participatory and transparent VPA process as an opportunity to contribute towards a trade in assured legal timber, improved forest governance - including recognition of tenure rights - and better democracy. **To date we have, however, not seen these advances in Guyana and hope the process is scaled down until real, independent civil society participation is guaranteed by all parties involved in the Guyana VPA negotiation process.**

The high quality of the existing VPAs^{iv} rests on the manner by which they were developed: an inclusive and effective multi-stakeholder participation process. All six VPAs concluded to date were negotiated by social and environmental NGOs, community representatives, the timber industry, and the government. All stakeholder groups participated in national VPA committees and relevant working groups. Decisions were mostly made by consensus. Industry, NGO and community representatives were appointed through a process of self selection. Each process worked hard to secure impartial facilitation and chairing of the multi-stakeholder forum, and funding that was independent of any special interest.

These VPAs have shown that these multi-stakeholder processes have the potential to create the basis for necessary change towards just and genuinely sustainable forest management. Examples include:

- Ongoing legal reform processes to address the issues of illegality on the domestic market, and tenure rights of local communities to land and trees, in Ghana and Liberia.

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- The development of a civil society-led Independent Forest Monitoring Network in Indonesia to monitor the implementation of Indonesia's Timber Legality Assurance System and related activities.
- An improved forestry standard – based on a multi-stakeholder process, and the free prior informed consent of collective landowners – that accommodates and facilitates small scale forest users and small industry in Indonesia.

We are very concerned that Guyana's VPA initiative is presently a government-driven process, led by the Guyana Forestry Commission. The Road Map for Guyana provides for stakeholder engagement or broad stakeholder consultations consistent with the 'Guyana vision', but it is not clarified what this vision is, nor how meaningful civil society and community engagement will be organised. The 'key stakeholders' listed on page seven of the Road Map appear to include only those organisations and indigenous peoples' representations that have been validated by the government.^v We note that indigenous peoples have raised concerns about the VPA process and that so far their inputs have not been taken on board by the government or the EU.^{vi}

We appeal to the EU and the Government of Guyana to redesign the initiative and to review the VPA schedule such that the VPA process in Guyana can eventually meet the high standards set in other countries by the six concluded VPAs. We are extremely concerned that if a VPA in Guyana is allowed to move ahead without ensuring a proper multi-stakeholder consultation process with independence in secretariat, chairmanship and funding, similar to that in the other VPA countries, it risks undermining the potential of the VPAs to improve forest governance and thereby risks undermining the whole EU FLEGT process.

We urge all parties concerned in the negotiation process to ensure the process in Guyana is put on hold until a multi stakeholder committee based on a self selection process has been formed and indigenous peoples and civil society have a chance to put the key issues on the table.

Yours sincerely,

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c.c.

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ⁱ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/guyana/documents/press_corner/euguyanaflegt.pdf Joint statement on a (VPA) between Guyana and the European Union

ⁱⁱ www.lcds.gov.gy/images/stories/Documents/MOU.pdf See also Joint Concept Note at www.lcds.gov.gy/images/stories/Documents/Joint%20Concept%20Note%20%28JCN%29%202012.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Version 3 of the Joint Concept Note, December 2012

www.regjeringen.no/upload/MD/2012/Nyheter/JCN_2012_final.pdf Version 3 of the Joint Concept Note, December 2012

^{iv} www.euflegt.efi.int/portal/home/vpa_countries VPA Countries

^v www.forestry.gov.gy/Downloads/Roadmap_for_Guyana_EU_FLEGT_VPA_Process_Final_January_2013.pdf
Roadmap for Guyana – EU FLEGT VPA Process

^{vi} APA (2013) *Concerns about EU FLEGT VPA Negotiations* APA Letter to the Guyana Forestry Commission, 23 April 2013