

**Inter-American Court of Human Rights**

**Twelve Saramaka Clans v. Suriname**

**Affidavit of Silvi Adjako**

**Submitted by**

**The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**

**and**

**The Victims' Representatives**

**02 May 2007**

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**I. GENERAL**

***A. Ms. Adjako, please state your personal details (i.e., your age, name of village, the Saramaka clan to which you belong, etc.)***

1. My name is Sylvia Adjako. I was born in *Desion (Grantatai)* a village that is now flooded because of the building of the Afobaka dam. *Desion* is my father's village. I'm over fifty years old and I belong to the Matjau *lö*. I presently live in my mother's village, which is called Kajapaati. This is one of the transmigration villages on the Upper Suriname River. I am a single mother and my livelihood is based on farming. Every year I plant crops in my farm in the forest. I grow some cash crops like peanuts and if I have any surplus crops from my subsistence crop, I sell these so that I can buy things that I and my family need and that we cannot get from the forest.

**II. THE PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL IMPACT OF LOGGING OPERATIONS IN SARAMAKA TERRITORY AND EFFORTS TO OBTAIN REDRESS FOR DESTRUCTION OF SUBSISTENCE RESOURCES**

***A. Did the Ji Shen logging company have a concession and cut timber on land that you and other Saramaka people occupy or use? If so, can you explain who you understand to be the owner of this land?***

2. Yes, this company did come to our forest and cut the trees. According to the law of the Saramaka people, the land where Ji Shen worked belongs to the Matjau *lö*, which is my clan.

***B. Who has the authority under Saramaka law to allow the Ji Shen company to work on the land where they had a concession?***

3. The land where Ji Shen was working belongs to the Matjau *lö* and Captain Cesar, who is Captain of Kajapaati village and from the Matjau *lö*, is the authority who has to give permission if people want to work on that land. This is true for both Saramaka people and for outsiders.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from a digital transcript recorded on 7 and 8 April 2007. The original recording is in Saramaka language.

***C. Do you know if the Captain who has authority in this area was informed by the government or anyone else that Ji Shen had received a concession and would be logging in your land?***

4. No, the Captain did not know anything. When the Chinese arrived for the first time, we were together with the Captain in a meeting in our village and we were all surprised to learn that they had arrived and these things were happening on our land. Captain Cesar told us that he did not know anything about their arrival. He said that the Chinese people did not come to meet and talk with him, nobody from the government came to talk with him, and that the *Gaama* also did not know about this.

***D. Can you explain what happened when the Ji Shen logging company came to your land?***

5. The children came to tell us that there were some Chinese in the woods. I do not know why, but the Chinese went straight to my farm, where I had planted peanuts, and they put their equipment, machines and containers there. They did not talk to anyone, not with me, not even with Captain Cesar first. We were very afraid and very angry about this, and we immediately started talking about what to do. We talked in the village and with other villages. Eventually the Captains had a big meeting and then they talked with *Gaama* Songo. It was around this time that the Captain's Association was created, I remember because I was at the meeting where they decided to do it.

***E. The State has said that your farm was destroyed accidentally.<sup>2</sup> What is your view about this?***

6. That is not true and how would the government know, nobody from the government has even visited the area to look at what the Chinese did there. When the Ji Shen company arrived in the forest, there was my farm, an easily identifiable open area full of peanut plants. It did not look anything like the surrounding forest, you could not miss it. I had also built myself a shelter there as well so that I could rest when the sun was too hot or when it was raining. They went to our land and to my farm on purpose and put all their materials there (heavy equipment, containers etc). I think that they use it as a storage depot. When they started making roads they also destroyed two more of my farms. One of these farms had approximately 200 cassava plants, 120 banana plants, 50 napi, 40 *pomtayer*, 7 yams, 50 ginger, 20 sugarcane, 20 sweet potato, and other plants. My third farm had been cleared and was ready for planting but I had not planted crops in it yet. This was also destroyed. It is very hard work to clear a farm so even the farm that had not yet been planted was a major loss for me. These farms were also very obvious and did not look like the surrounding forest. How could it have been an accident? And if they had asked someone first they would have known that it was a farm if they did not know.

7. My aunt Rona Julliette also lost her farm that was full of peanut plants. The Chinese gave her 80 Suriname dollars (SRD), which is approximately

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<sup>2</sup> *Submission of the State of Suriname*, 26 March 2007, para. 76.

US\$35. My cousin also lost his farm. In total, Ji Shen destroyed 6 farms in just a small area when it first started work in its concession and I know that more were destroyed later as well. The same also happened in the Tacoba concession. They did not do destroy our farms by accident, it was on purpose. They just did not care that we were there and that it was our land.

***F. After you discovered that the company had destroyed your farm, what did you do?***

8. We went to Ji Shen to talk with them. They said that they had permission from the government and that there was nothing we could do about them being there. They also said that if we complained about them, we would be put in prison in Paramaribo. I heard that the people from Tacoba said the same thing to Saramaka people when they met them. We kept talking with Ji Shen, we would not leave them alone. For instance, I went with Hugo Jabini and with Captain Adjako and with other people. Finally, they agreed to give me some compensation and they paid me (what is now) SRD90.00, which is approximately US\$40.00. They paid my Aunt Ronda SRD80, or about US\$35.00. We argued that this was not proper compensation, but they would not give us more and they chased us away. My farm provides enough food for more than six months, and the same would have been true for the cleared farm that was yet to be planted. The peanut farm provided cash income that I cannot earn elsewhere. From the peanut farm alone I would have expected have made at least US\$765.00. My second farm was approximately 3 hectares in size and was planted with cassava, banana, *napi*, Yams, *pomtayer*, sweet potato, ginger, etc., and it was worth much more in cash value than the peanut farm and it had enough food for my family for many months.

9. Because my farms were destroyed, I lost enough food for my family for more than one year and money for supplies that I cannot get from the forest. I had to ask my relatives for food and I was ashamed that I did not have a farm of my own. Saramaka women must have a farm or people think that we are lazy and not doing our part for our family and our community. It hurt me very much what Ji Shen did and it also hurt my community because what one of us suffers we all suffer when our land is involved and when our food supplies and the forest are destroyed. It reminds us that it is still possible for the time of slavery to come back again when we see these things.

10. I also participated in all the ASA meetings that I could attend. Sometime I traveled all the way to the other end of the River to attend ASA meetings in villages up the river. I wanted to give my full support to the Saramaka people's efforts to get our rights recognized and I wanted to tell other Saramaka what had happened on our land, what Ji Shen had done to our forest. Because all Saramaka see what Ji Shen and Tacoba did as a collective threat to all of us, we all joined together to try to stop these violations of our rights. Our most important concern was to make sure that the government will recognize that we are the owners of our lands and of Saramaka territory, this is the most important thing for us. If we do not do this, the spirits of our ancestors and the forest and other spirits will be greatly angered and punish us. We are very concerned about this and very fearful that it may happen.

***G. Did you see Suriname Army soldiers guarding the Ji Shen concession?***

11. Yes, there were soldiers there. They were there to protect the Chinese. It made people very nervous to have soldiers around here.

***H. How do you personally feel about the operations of the logging company on your people's land?***

12. I have a very bad feeling about this; it makes me sick when I think about it and I am afraid of what will happen to us now. Our land and the forest is everything for us. It's our life. What the Chinese did threatens our future, the future of all Saramaka people. Our descendents will face enormous problems because of this. I know what it is like to lose land; I am from a transmigration village, we cannot let this happen again or there will be no more Saramaka people, we will be like ghosts.

***J. Do you think that the operations of the logging company and the presence of the Army in Saramaka lands has had a collective impact on your village, your clan and the Saramaka people as a whole? Please explain.***

13. Yes, it makes our life bad. The Chinese disturbed our lives and we cannot forget this. They caused much destruction in our forest and made parts of our land useless because they blocked the creeks and made the water sit on the earth. Before then we were able to use the forest freely and quietly and it was a great comfort to us and supported us. This of course affects all Saramaka because this area is part of Saramaka territory and it is the place where we are safe, where outsiders cannot mistreat us. It affects my clan because all of us own the land that the Chinese destroyed; just because my farm was there does not change the fact that it is the land of my clan that belongs to all of us. Now it difficult for the Saramaka to go to this area and because of the road the Chinese made, the area is now visited, usually at night, by professional hunters who are killing the animals that we need to live. Like the Chinese, they waste so much. We are not able to use the wood freely as before. The spirits are angry because of this and this affects all Saramaka. Yes, it hurts all of us because this is the place where we should be safe.

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Ms. Silvi Adjako