



RESOLUTIONS
Amerindian Peoples Association
9th General Assembly
May 10 – 12, 2016
St Cuthbert's Village (Pakuri)

**“50 Years of Independence, 25 Years of Advocacy –
How closer are we to fully securing our rights?”**

Preamble: Representatives from 68 villages from across the country have met over the past three days to discuss the work of the Amerindian Peoples Association and the issues at stake for indigenous peoples in Guyana today. In this year of Guyana's Golden Jubilee, we have discussed how far we have come as indigenous peoples in securing our rights, and recommitted ourselves to defending them. As our country celebrates its Jubilee, we also recognize our decades-long struggle to have our lands recognized. Today, the international community recognizes that indigenous lands hold some of the last real forests on our planet, and we are prepared to contribute to protecting them for the future of our country and mother earth.

These resolutions and recommendations are addressed to the Government of Guyana, to cooperating international agencies (UNDP, World Bank, IDB, etc.), to the Government of Norway, to allies and supporters, and to our own community units. They will also guide the strategy and actions of the APA over the coming 3 years, both to support our rights and to highlight the proactive measures and projects our communities are engaged in to build a stronger, greener, and more just Guyana.

RESOLUTIONS

LAND RIGHTS

Our land is our life. As indigenous peoples of Guyana, land rights are our number one priority and concern. Most if not all communities are unsatisfied with the lands that have been titled or demarcated, and with the extensions granted so far. They do not respond to our long-standing demands for our customary traditional lands, and are not sufficient to guarantee a sustainable future for our peoples. We therefore call on the Government of Guyana, as well as cooperating agencies, to recognize and secure the full extent of our traditional lands, according to our internationally recognized rights. To this end, we make the following recommendations:

- We call on the Government of Guyana to establish an Indigenous Lands Commission to address unresolved land issues with the utmost urgency.
- Recognizing our land rights must be part of any programs, policies, or development initiatives that affect our lands and resources.
- Waterways should be included in land titles.
- Clauses within the laws of Guyana that protect the rights of third parties in our lands should be removed, as they allow concessions to remain on our lands, creating ongoing problems and restricting our rights.
- Government agencies (IE GFC, GGMC, MNRE, MIPA) must coordinate amongst themselves, and MIPA must ensure that land tenure information is provided to these agencies regularly, so indigenous lands and rights are respected when concessions are considered or granted.
- Any investigation reports resulting from government titling, demarcation or extension exercises must be sent back to our communities, and approved by them.
- Communities should be involved in land demarcation exercises, with our maps recognized and utilized, and community members participating actively in boundary marking and demarcation.

Amerindian Land Titling Project: the project must be extended by at least 3 years, following a review and suspension to ensure that an operational protocol is agreed upon that includes an FPIC procedure being agreed to with communities and representative organizations. The protocol must include transparency and grievance mechanisms.

Finally, we commend the government's recent public commitment to ratifying ILO Convention 169 and the American Convention on Human Rights, and call on it to do so as soon as possible.

FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT

Nothing for us, without us! As indigenous peoples, we want our country and our communities to develop in a way that is based on real needs and a positive, constructive and collective vision of the future. Development plans should be truly participatory, based on community demands, creative, forward-looking, and supportive of our environment, cultures and ways of life. Full participation, as owners of forests and lands (titled and as yet untitled traditional lands), must therefore be ensured in all discussions that have to do with our lands, forests, resources, rights and development. FPIC procedures that meet international standards must be established and respected with regard to any legislation, policy, or development initiative that affects us.

No mining, forestry, agricultural or other concessions should be granted on titled or untitled customary lands of indigenous communities without their free, prior and informed consent.

LEGISLATION & GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The Amerindian Act: as communities and as members of the APA, we have expressed serious concerns with the Amerindian Act since it was passed in 2006. International bodies have also concluded that it does not live up to international standards. The current administration committed to reforming the Amerindian Act in its campaign, and has publicly stated support for reform after the elections. The Amerindian Act needs to be reformed now!

The Forest Act, Mining Act, Protected Areas Act, and other relevant legislation must be revised to be in line with the revised Amerindian Act and international standards.

Human Rights Commission: government promises to establish a Human Rights Commission should be upheld, and the Commission created urgently.

Indigenous Peoples Commission: the terms of the current members of the Indigenous Peoples Commission have expired. The IPC needs to be reconvened, with new members named in a transparent manner and according to the established policy.

Climate change policies and programs (LCDS, FPCF, GCF, OLPC, etc.): Communities need information on climate change and related policies, though they have been noting effects of climate change on food sovereignty, health, and water resources in their communities. Full consultation on climate change programs and policies has not yet taken place; the prior process was flawed and highly politicized. This Assembly has the following resolutions and recommendations:

- Communities need more information and capacity building on climate change policies.
- We encourage the Government of Guyana to take a strong rights-based approach to climate change policies and programs.
- As forest owners and managers, indigenous communities must participate in decision-making and benefit from climate change policies and programs that Guyana engages in. For example, the NTC needs to review the Opt-in Mechanism, and ensure that indigenous communities are involved in the final review and approval of this mechanism.
- Land rights issues must be addressed as a necessary first step prior to implementing any such policies or programs.
- We call on the government and other agencies to provide support and technical advice for community forest management and governance, and to support the ongoing efforts of our communities, which have been effective in protecting forests.
- We call on the government and other agencies to provide quick responses to emergencies and support for adaptation initiatives.
- Climate change should be included in school curricula at all levels, with the attention due to the urgency it presents. Indigenous knowledge, experiences and solutions to climate change should be emphasized.

The Government of Guyana must provide information and updated documents in a timely and transparent manner to communities regarding any policies or programmes that affect us, our lands and resources.

Reports sent to the Government of Norway and other donors or agencies must be made public.

FORESTRY

FLEGT: The APA regrets that vital recommendations made by indigenous communities with regards to the need to protect our inherent rights to lands and resources in the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between Guyana and the EU have still not been accommodated in the draft legality definition. Moving forward, the APA calls on the government of Guyana and the EU to ensure that the VPA, including the definition of legal timber, contains clear and strong safeguards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples of Guyana to our lands, territories and resources in line with the Constitution and international human rights law and standards. If such protections are not in place in the VPA text and annexes before signing, the APA cannot and will not endorse it.

Protected Areas: indigenous peoples have protected the environment since time immemorial. Indigenous land rights must therefore be recognized prior to establishing any new protected areas. Communities must be considered land and forest owners and fully involved in any co-management agreements or management plans.

Community forestry: Current forest law and regulations restrict and at times criminalize traditional use of resources by indigenous communities. We therefore call on the Guyana Forestry Commission to ensure transparency and our participation in the development of regulations, and that the regulations are specifically tailored to the needs and demands of indigenous communities. We also call for quality trainings on the use of GPS, as well as support for the purchase of necessary equipment to comply with legality requirements. Trained community members can and should conduct verifications and other work needed.

Concessions: We call on GFC, EPA, relevant government agencies and independent NGOs to investigate the operations of large-scale logging companies such as Bai Shan Lin and Barama immediately. Their findings and recommendations must be implemented to ensure transparency and that strong safeguards, including respect for our land rights and FPIC, are in place.

MINING

Mining brings with it a host of destructive social, environmental, and cultural impacts on our communities, our lands and waters. Solutions to these problems must urgently be sought, utilizing a rights-based approach, ensuring our participation and consent, and safeguarding our resources. We therefore call on the following:

- All mining concessions on titled and untitled customary lands, proposed extensions, and waterways within our lands and buffer zones, that have been allocated without the consent from the Village General Meeting must be cancelled, until and unless they obtain our Free, Prior and Informed Consent.
- Independent testing on mercury poisoning must be conducted and results shared with communities and relevant government agencies. Safeguards must be implemented to protect communities, our lands and waters against mercury pollution.
- GGMC should utilize modern technologies for monitoring, mining, and remediation, and implement adequate policies and procedures to ensure that communities are not left with problems resulting from mining. Communities affected by the impacts of mining should be compensated for the damages suffered.

ENERGY PRODUCTION

Large-scale hydro-dams have been proposed as an important part of green development in Guyana. These proposals, however, will have a destructive impact on our lands, waters and resources, and have not been fully consulted with our communities. We believe in green, sustainable energy production, and understand that it is a growing need for our country. We therefore call on cancelling any large-scale dam-building plans (i.e. Amaila Falls, Upper Mazaruni), and propose the development of appropriate small-scale hydro-power projects, as well as solar and wind power. Training in maintenance and repair must be provided, along with provisions for the safe recycling or disposal of batteries and other components.

HEALTH

Access to quality healthcare, both in terms of facilities and medical personnel, is inadequate in our communities. Over the past three days, we heard a number of similar concerns regarding healthcare coming from indigenous communities across Guyana. Indigenous communities should have access to quality healthcare, and we thereby call for the following:

- Well-trained and qualified medical staff, with training in needed specialities, including mental health.
- Provide support and incentives for qualified medical staff (doctors, community health workers, nurses, midwives, dentists, etc.) to remain in our communities.
- Good equipment, sufficient supply of medicines, and clean, modern facilities, with upgraded district hospitals and mortuaries.
- Improvements to existing hostels, and creation of separate maternity facilities.
- Ministry of Public Health should liaise with the Guyana Geology and Mining Commission when concessions are issued, to ensure that community health concerns are addressed, including public health issues, water and sanitation, malaria, dengue, and impacts from mercury and other mining processes.
- Special attention to the community of Baramita, which has been heavily impacted by mining, and is experiencing a suicide epidemic.

SOCIAL ISSUES

All indigenous communities, in particular youth, face a number of challenges relating to social welfare and education. For this reason, we call on government agencies, donors and allies, to support communities in developing forward-looking programs to address these issues:

- Develop long-term and certified programs for skills development including in computers and information technology, for youth in our communities.
- Train community welfare officers, provide parenting training, and provide recreational opportunities for youth.
- Communications technologies should be implemented in indigenous communities, for use in educational settings as well as communications in general.
- Include social welfare officers in all indigenous communities in Guyana.
- Special attention should be paid to the needs of persons with disabilities in our communities, and equal access to school, work and other opportunities must be ensured.
- Communities need access to dependable free or low-cost legal support.
- We call on the government and support agencies to establish training programs that respond to community needs, and to provide scholarships for young indigenous people to study at the university level and beyond, particularly in the field of law.

WOMEN

The APA commits itself to the empowerment of indigenous women. We commit to finding support and funding for the issues that impact women in particular, including health, income generation, establishment of safe houses and other programs; protecting traditional crafts and languages; and skills exchanges. We further commit to combating domestic violence and other issues in our communities.

GENERAL

We call on supporting the National Toshias Council (NTC) to obtain full information on the issues affecting the indigenous peoples of Guyana and to actively exercise its rights and responsibilities in representation of indigenous communities across the country. We encourage members of the NTC to take strong stands on the issues that affect us, and commit to holding our Toshias accountable to the communities they represent.

We call on our Regional Democratic Councils to fully exercise their responsibilities, seeking updated information and ensuring constant communication back with the communities.

As members of the APA, we call on the APA – its head office and unit members – to prioritize the areas of concern highlighted in these resolutions, and to promote programs and projects that can help us address them.

We call on government agencies, allies, and the APA to provide capacity building on relevant legislation (i.e. Forestry Law, Mining Law, Protected Areas, etc.) and the rights of indigenous peoples, and to build skills in mapping, forest monitoring, and information technology.

As an organization based in communities spread out through Guyana, we commit ourselves to finding innovative ways to communicate amongst ourselves, as well as with relevant agencies and the general public.

As leaders and active members of our communities, we commit to bringing the information gathered at this Assembly and future events back home, informing our communities, and encouraging them to take action.

Finally, we wish to recognize the unwavering dedication that a number of people have played over time to build the APA and advance the cause of indigenous peoples in Guyana, often at great personal sacrifice and even danger to their lives. Some of these people are still actively engaged with the organization, and we give them all our support; others have passed, or can no longer contribute to our work due to illness. We salute them, and call on their strength to continue the fight.