UPR-53 Pre-Sessions Statement on SURINAME

Statement by a Coalition of NGO's representing Indigenous leaders, conservation organizations and Human Rights Defenders
Thursday, August 27th 2026

Stakeholders Report Name: ***The Future of Our Forefathers: A Legal Roadmap for the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and the Rights of Nature in Suriname.***

This statement is delivered on behalf of a coalition of Surinamese NGOs.

My name is Ikihie, a descendant of the Kalina and Lokono peoples in Suri'yama. I stand here as an Indigenous person whose identity, culture and future are inseparable from the land they call Suriname.

We are proud that Suri'yama is the most forested country on Earth.

Indigenous communities have declared and protect 7.2 million hectares of rainforest in the south, and many more in the coastal area.

But there is a contradiction. We protect the forests, while our rights remain unrecognized. We have no constitutional recognition, and no secure collective land rights.

In 2022, Suriname accepted multiple UPR recommendations and pledged to recognize ancestral land titles, enforce international rulings, and protect Indigenous territories. But international promises mean nothing without domestic action.

Eleven years after the Inter-American Court's judgment in the *Kaliña and Lokono* case, the structural reforms remain unfinished. Today, Suriname is the only country in the Western Hemisphere that does not recognize its Indigenous peoples. We have no collective voice, cultural safeguards, and legal authority to protect our ancestral homelands from commercial invasion.

As a child of the Kalina and Lokono peoples, I ask: How can we protect a forest for future generations when the law does not recognize our right to protect our own territory?

This is not a question of property. For us, land is identity, culture, food, water, spirituality and responsibility across generations.

Our Indigenous Paramount Chief, Jimmy Toeroemang, described this reality to the former colonizer, the King of the Netherlands in 2025: "*We are left with an unnatural status quo in which we now must play a Western, legal game to regain what - historically and spiritually- has always been ours.*"

This is why Free, Prior and Informed Consent matters. Indigenous communities were not meaningfully consulted in the drafting of the national report. Decisions about our territories are still made without our meaningful participation.

Proposals for legal reform have been submitted to Parliament for years. An Indigenous FPIC protocol was

presented to government in 2025. None have been adopted. Meanwhile, pressure continues from mining, logging, large-scale agriculture and new industrial development.

The consequences are not theoretical. In May 2023, two of my peoples were unrighteous killed in Pikin Saron. In June this year, cyanide and mercury poisoned the Saramacca River, leaving communities without clean water and fishing grounds. This is not just an environmental issue — it is a question of health, food, water, culture, and survival.

Our Indigenous worldview understands people, forests, rivers, animals, ancestors and future generations as interconnected. This is why our report connects Indigenous rights with the Rights of Nature.

Suriname accepted critical environmental recommendations, but our regulatory bodies remain starved of resources. The National Environmental Authority operates on less than thirty percent of its budget. Without an institutional ally to hold companies accountable, our communities face a double injustice: defending their lands against unmonitored extraction while simultaneously struggling to access basic rights like safe drinking water, education, and healthcare in the interior.

Now, Suriname is entering a new economic era — with offshore oil and gas, continued mining, large-scale agriculture and carbon markets. We are not against development. We ask: development for whom, decided by whom, and at whose cost?

If our forests generate value, the Indigenous peoples who have protected those forests must be at the table.

Today, we ask Member States to hold Suriname accountable for two fundamental changes.

First, recognize the role of my peoples:

1. Implement the Kaliña and Lokono Judgement.
2. Adopt the FPIC framework as binding law.
3. Ratify the Escazú Agreement.

Secondly, move toward a holistic human-rights framework:

4. Legally recognize the Rights of Nature and rights of future generations
5. Acknowledge Indigenous peoples as guardians of nature, by recognizing co-management of nature in legislation.

Protecting Indigenous rights, nature, and future generations are not three different goals. They are one responsibility.

Thank you.