

IHRC – OU Written Statement.
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This statement is delivered on behalf of the University of Oklahoma College of Law International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC-OU). The IHRC is an academic center of practical training in the field of International Human Rights. We have been engaged with the mechanisms of the Universal Periodic Review since 2009, and to date, the IHRC has submitted 29 reports focusing on the rights of indigenous peoples.

This statement addresses the issues of health and environment, focusing on the situation affecting the Apetina and Anapayke communities in Southeastern Suriname.

In 2012, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples submitted a letter to the Government of Suriname, requesting information about the measures taken by Suriname to address the health and environmental situation resulting from goldmining activities, that are causing mercury contamination among the indigenous peoples and their lands.

Regrettably, there was no response to this letter from the Government of Suriname on record. The lack of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples has been significant; especially taking into consideration that since 2003, the Government of Suriname has officially recognized the mercury problem associated with small-scale gold mining. It is extremely worrying that the Government has yet to provide any kind of information about the health and environmental situation of the indigenous communities affected by mercury contamination.

In 2015, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Suriname “take specific measures to ensure that no mercury is used or dispersed on indigenous occupied territories, that contaminated areas are cleaned, that the indigenous peoples affected are given access to drinkable water and health care.” Suriname’s combined sixteenth to eighteenth periodic reports, submitted in 2019, regrettably did not satisfactorily reply to the letter, due to not addressing the recommendations posed by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The IHRC respectfully makes two recommendations to ensure subsequent positive and practical action and reform.

One, that Suriname allows a third-party neutral expert to survey the full extent of the impact mercury has had on the health and environment of the indigenous peoples, as well as get accurate data regarding the pervasiveness of small illegal gold mines.

And two, consider extending an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to conduct an official visit within the next two years.

Thank you for your time and attention.