



**STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND POLICE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SURINAME, THE HON. MARTIN MISIEDJAN, HELD
AT THE 18TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2011
IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Suriname, I wish to thank the esteemed members of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the recommendations made in response to our country's national human rights report which was submitted and presented to the council in respectively February and May of this year. I may inform your esteemed council that discussions regarding these recommendations have prompted an additional in-depth evaluation of our national human rights situation by the Government of Suriname.

A significant number of the recommendations made by your esteemed council have - after careful deliberation - been accepted. The State feels that these recommendations provide a sound foundation for the implementation of policy aimed at providing a more effective protection and enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, they constitute a solid framework for our nation's human rights agenda.

This framework encompasses socio-economic, political and cultural rights, as well as an outline of the necessary conditions for adequate enjoyment of said rights.

Even though the diversity of the recommendations which have been accepted, present an additional challenge to Suriname, they will be dealt with by the State in a most positive manner.

The recommendations accepted by the Government of the Republic of Suriname, are grouped under paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report to the Council.

Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the Council,

There remain however, a number of recommendations which at this time, cannot be accepted by the State. The reason for this is the fact that the issues which the recommendations pertain to, are at present being analyzed by the Government. Due to their prospective impact on society as a whole, they demand a broad national discussion and consensus.

One such issue is the claim to land rights. Subsequent governments have - each in their own way - tried to deal with the issue of land rights. In dealing with this issue, two things must be taken into account. On the one hand there is the claim made by the Maroon and Indigenous people on the land which they have lived on, cultivated and utilized for centuries. This claim is aimed at the State's recognition that they, the Maroon and Indigenous people, have a right to this land.

On the other hand, the Government deems the entire territory of the Republic of Suriname to belong to the State, with the exception of those instances in which a third party can prove otherwise. Furthermore, the State has decreed that each Surinamese citizen,

including those of maroon and indigenous descent, are entitled to request land within the State's domain.

In the past decennia, the issue has developed in such a way, that it has assumed the nature of a conflict between Maroon and Indigenous people on one side, and the Surinamese State on the other side; thus a conflict between the Government and a group of its citizens.

Due in part to different definitions of the issue, various interpretations of both the historical context as well as the result of the development process after our country's decolonization and the ambitions of the State, this matter could not be dealt with adequately and as yet no solution has been arrived at. The need for a satisfactory solution is now more pressing than ever!

All of us, offspring of the Republic of Suriname, must come to realize that the so called land rights issue is a national issue, an issue which concerns the entire nation. It would be unacceptable for Maroon and Indigenous people to stand in opposition to the rest of society because of this or any other issue.

By deciding upon a direction in which the nation should proceed, we must, under all circumstances, keep public interest in mind. In doing so we must, as a people, strive to overcome all obstacles which may be encountered along the way. A cooperative and constructive approach of all those involved, even a coming together of the entire Surinamese nation – is an absolute necessity for arriving at a satisfactory solution to the issue of land rights.

The Government will need to identify an instrument through which the entire nation will come to realize that the issue of land rights is a national issue. Against this backdrop, the land right conferences which have been planned by the Government, strive to provide a platform for representatives from all areas of society, to arrive at a

redefinition of the issue, thus laying the groundwork for an environment in which the rights of all citizens, including those of the Maroon and Indigenous people, may be respected and realized within the scope of the State's ambitions.

Mr. Chairman, another highly sensitive issue is that of specific recognition of the rights of Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender individuals, the so-called LBGT.

First of all, our Government feels that the constitution of the Republic of Suriname provides adequate protection from discrimination to all. The constitution states that no individual may be discriminated against because of birth, sex, race, language, ancestry, education, political persuasion, economic status, social circumstance *or any other status*.

Notwithstanding the above, any attempt to embed specific rights for LBGT individuals in our legislation, is doomed to failure without the support of Parliament. Since Parliament is but a reflection of the people, any legislative initiative regarding such a highly controversial issue, must be preceded by a broad national discussion, in which the views of both the LBGT individuals, as well as those of other relevant groups in society, shall have to be taken in to account and respected.

Finally Mr. Chairman, a number of protocols and conventions cannot at this time be ratified by the State, as was recommended by various members of your esteemed council. The reason for this lies in the fact that the issues at hand also require a broad national discussion, for example when it comes to the ILO convention 169.

The recommendations which cannot be accepted at this time, are grouped under Chapter IV of this report.

Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the United Nations Human Rights Council, even though a number of recommendations have not at this time been accepted by the Republic of Suriname, our Government is very much aware of the fact that they provide a challenge to improving the overall human rights situation in Suriname. I may assure you that these recommendations will enjoy the continued attention of the Government of the Republic of Suriname.

I thank you.