

Status of Human Rights in Suriname for the 39th Session of the Universal Periodic Review

Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The purpose of this report is to raise concerns regarding human rights violations in the Republic of Suriname (Suriname) for the 39th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Suriname is one of the smallest countries in South America, and it is neighbored by Guyana, Brazil, and French Guiana. It has a population of approximately 590,246 people¹. Suriname is a predominately Christian nation with 52.3% identifying as Christians, 18.8% as Hindu, 14.3 as Muslims, 6.2% as unaffiliated, 5.6% as varying folk religions, and 1.9% as other².

3. Suriname's last review was held on 2 May 2016. As a result of this review 148 recommendations were made, 119 of which Suriname supported³. The recommendations included encouraging Suriname to “[t]ake steps to implement its road map for combating human trafficking in order to ensure compliance with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, including by establishing an interagency anti-trafficking structure; take steps to reduce the demand for sex trafficking and forced labour, including through public education and advocacy campaigns” and to “[i]ncrease efforts to identify and provide assistance to victims of human trafficking and implement and provide adequate financing for the national strategy to combat human trafficking”⁴. Both of these recommendations were supported by Suriname.

Legal Framework

4. Article 14 of Suriname's constitution states that “[e]veryone has a right to life. This right shall be protected by law”⁵. Furthermore, under Article 15 “No one shall be obliged to do forced or compulsory labor”⁶.

5. Article 334 of Suriname's penal code lays out penalties for forced labour.

Anyone who conducts the slave trade for his own account or for another account or who intentionally participates in the slave trade, directly or indirectly, shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding twelve years⁷.

6. Suriname is also bound to the international treaties and covenants to which it is a party, one of which is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Under Article 32 of the CRC:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to

interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:

- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
- (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
- (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article⁸.

7. Article 35 of the CRC goes on to state that "States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form"⁹.

8. Suriname is also bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which states in Article 8 that "[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude"¹⁰.

9. In 2019, Suriname recognized its ongoing problem with forced labour and human trafficking, and in an effort to tackle that problem it ratified the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 1930¹¹. Article 1 states:

1. In giving effect to its obligations under the Convention to suppress forced or compulsory labour, each Member shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate its use, to provide to victims protection and access to appropriate and effective remedies, such as compensation, and to sanction the perpetrators of forced or compulsory labour.

2. Each Member shall develop a national policy and plan for action for the effective and sustained suppression of forced or compulsory labour in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations, which shall involve systematic action by the competent authorities and, as appropriate, in coordination with employers' and workers' organizations, as well as with other groups concerned.

3. The definition of forced or compulsory labour contained in the Convention is reaffirmed, and thereafter the measures referred to in this Protocol shall include a specific action against trafficking in persons for the purposes of forced or compulsory labour¹².

Human Trafficking

10. Suriname is home to a small population and its “economy is dependent on mineral resources, mainly oil, gold, and bauxite, from which alumina . . . is made”¹³. Much of Suriname is covered in rainforest, “[n]early all of Suriname’s population lives along the coast,” and Suriname’s interior is quite remote, “where outsiders may only reach the communities via airplane . . .”¹⁴. The remote nature of Suriname’s interior both makes it easy for human traffickers to work with impunity, and for difficulty in data tracing incidents of human trafficking. It also limits the amount and type of stories available to highlight the issue.

11. Within Suriname, human traffickers target women and children for sexual exploitation as well as low-skilled labor jobs in the country’s interior mining regions¹⁵. Women and girls are sexually exploited in the mining camps and are forced to work in brothels, bars, and strip clubs¹⁶. While it is known that human trafficking occurs in Suriname, the government’s lack of resources and training in these remote interior regions pose a challenge for police. Unfortunately, the full scope of human trafficking is unknown, and as a result, most cases go unreported and uninvestigated¹⁷.

12. As acknowledged above, since its previous UPR Suriname has taken steps to address these problems such as ratifying the Protocol of 2014 to the Force Labour Convention 1930 as well as created an Anti-Trafficking unit which is specifically tasked with investigating cases of human trafficking¹⁸.

13. The Anti-Trafficking unit will be used to undertake the critical tasks to combat human trafficking through training to better identify cases of human trafficking, spreading awareness, and working with other law enforcement to identify links between other crimes and human trafficking¹⁹. It is our hope that this unit will also be used to provide accurate data as to the full scope of human trafficking within the country.

Conclusion:

14. We are pleased that Suriname has recognized and taken steps toward addressing human trafficking within its borders, but it is critical that Suriname take further steps to provide aid and assistance for victims of human trafficking, as well as provide regular and accurate data regarding the full scope of human trafficking within the country.

¹ *Suriname Population 2021 (Live)*, WORLD POPULATION REVIEW, available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/suriname-population>.

² *Suriname*, PEW-TEMPLETON, available at http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/suriname#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2020®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016.

³ UPR of Suriname – Second Cycle Thematic List of Recommendations, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/SRindex.aspx>.

⁴ UPR of Suriname – Second Cycle Thematic List of Recommendations, A/HRC/33/4/ - Para. 133 & A/HRC/33/4/Add. 1 – Para. 4, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/SRindex.aspx>.

⁵ Constitution of Suriname, art. 14, *available at*

https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Surinam_1992.pdf?lang=en.

⁶ *Id.* at art 15.

⁷ Penal Code of Suriname art.334, *available at*

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=102212&p_classification=01.04 (unofficial translation).

⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 32, *available at*

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

⁹ *Id.* at art. 35.

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1966, S. Treaty Doc. No. 95-20, 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, art. 8.

¹¹ *Suriname Renews Commitment to Combat Forced Labour*, ILO (10 Jun. 2019), *available at*

https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/forced-labour/WCMS_709934/lang--en/index.htm.

¹² Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, art. 1, *available at*

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:P029.

¹³ *Suriname: Economy*, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Suriname/Economy> (last visited 12 Feb. 2021).

¹⁴ *Suriname*, THE AMAZON CONSERVATION TEAM, <https://www.amazonteam.org/suriname/> (last visited 12 Feb. 2021).

¹⁵ *Human Trafficking Trends in the Western Hemisphere*, PERRY CENTER (Jun. 2020), *available at*

http://williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Human%20Trafficking%20Trends%20in%20the%20Western%20Hemisphere.pdf.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Suriname Renews Commitment to Combat Forced Labour*, ILO, *available at*

https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/forced-labour/WCMS_709934/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁹ *Id.*