

Indigenous peoples from Suriname call for recognition of their ancestral territory

--- In *Taino_News@yahoogroups.com*, "UCTP Office" <la_voz_taino@...> wrote:

Indigenous peoples from Suriname call for recognition of their ancestral territory and effective protection of their traditional practices

(Curitiba, Brazil) Governments and conservationists attending the eighth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP8) heard from indigenous leaders of the Lokono and Kaliña peoples about their own study of customary use of natural resources in their territory in the lower Marowijne area of Suriname. In two separate public presentations, the leaders showed how their customary resource use practices and traditional village authorities promote the sustainable use of biological resources in their area. They pointed out that these sustainable practices are threatened by imposed mining and logging concessions and government sale and privatization of their ancestral lands.

The presenters noted that existing protected areas undermine traditional practices because the Nature Conservation Act prohibits all hunting, fishing and gathering activities in such conservation areas. Henry Zaalman, chief of Marijkedorp community on the banks of the Marowijne explained:

Our land and territorial rights and our customary norms are not recognised under national laws, and the government has issued a number of logging and mining permits affecting our lands. Logging and mining by outsiders has driven away game animals. Our coastal areas are being invaded by commercial fishing boats. Nature Reserves limit our traditional hunting and fishing activities. The national school system does not take into account indigenous languages nor the knowledge systems of our peoples. Our lands are being reduced against our will. We are losing traditional control over our territory and resources and existing laws and policies on conservation and development are undermining our way of life.

CBD delegates were reminded by the indigenous leaders that under article 10(c) of the Convention governments have committed to protect customary use of biological resources and associated traditional practices.

Under article 8j of the CBD, Parties are also required to protect traditional knowledge, innovations and practices.

The leaders called for the legal recognition of their traditional ownership, use, and management of lands and natural resources in their territory. They stressed the need for official measures to improve implementation of commitments under

international conventions that have been ratified by Suriname, including articles 10c and 8j of the Convention on Biodiversity.

Steps to recognise the right of free prior and informed consent were also called for. It was noted that there may be a requirement for annulment of existing logging and mining concessions. The need for bilingual and multi-cultural education and school teachers in who can speak the native language was also highlighted.

The leaders emphasises that they have their own initiatives underway to secure their lands and protect their territory, including a proposal to prepare and implement their own natural resource and territorial management plan for the Lower Marowijne. They invited national and international agencies to back this important initiative of the Kaliña and Lokono peoples.