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**To: The Chairman of the Special Meeting of the Working Group
To Prepare the Proposed American Declaration of the Rights
Of Indigenous Peoples
Permanent Representative of Peru to the OAS
H.E. Ambassador Eduardo Ferrero Costa**

Excellency:

Referring to the oral statement presented by the representative of a Surinamese Non Governmental Indigenous Organization at, the Special Meeting of the Working Group to Prepare the Proposed American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples today, in the Hall of the Americas, this Permanent Mission would like to request that this letter be attached to the minutes of said meeting.

With respect to the protection of the Rights of Surinamese citizens it is necessary to note the following:


- **"That the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname is perfectly clear with respect to the guarantee of fundamental rights and liberties of all people in the territory of Suriname".**
- **"That the Constitution does not discriminate between different ethnic groups and that all, including indigenous and tribal communities, who are within the territory of Suriname, have equal claim on protection of person and property and freedom of philosophy of life".**
- **"That all forms of discrimination are forbidden".**
- **"That specific rights of indigenous and tribal communities are enshrined in the Surinamese legislation and several ministerial decrees".**

- **"That in case of infringements of individual or collective rights or freedoms, a claim can always be made in the Court of Law".**
- **"That all matters relating to the care of indigenous and tribal communities are with the Ministry of Regional Development and that this body is in regular contact with the official tribal and indigenous representatives".**
- **"That all Non Governmental Organizations established by Surinamese law are recognized by the Government".**

While the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname fully understands and recognizes the need for the contributions of civil society in these important deliberations, and therefore supports the effective participation of all Non Governmental Organizations in this process, we would like to request that these participants present their future contributions in a responsible and non controversial manner.

Thank you for your kind attention to this request.

Very truly yours,


Henry L. Illes
Permanent Representative

Special Session of the OAS Working Group
March 11-15, 2002
Washington, D.C.

APPENDIX

Intervention of March 14, 2002
Josien Aloema-Tokoe
Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname

Mr Chairman:

My name is Josien Aloema-Tokoe. I am from the Kari'na people in Suriname, a member of the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS) and also Area Coordinator for Human Rights, Culture, and Education of the coordinating body of the Indigenous organization in the Amazon Basin.

As the Area Coordinator of COICA for human rights, I will make some general comments. I am very glad that we, indigenous peoples of the Americas, are here together with government representatives, to talk about the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the countries of the Americas. This is my first time here in the Working Group in Washington, D.C. The countries that we live in have histories of colonization by Europeans. Most countries became independent after bloody fights. But we do not forget that we, the indigenous peoples, have an even longer history of being independent nations. The Europeans wanted to colonize us. We do not want that. We can live together, and we can show respect to governments if governments also fully respect our rights. Let us all show that we look far into the future, to see that respect for rights must be the basis. If there is no respect for rights, if there are no equal opportunities, if there is discrimination, if we are removed from our lands and territories, if our cultures are not respected, if money is the only thing that counts, if foreign companies and multinationals are more important than the first inhabitants of this continent, then you are creating victims. There are more than enough examples in the world where countries are big aggressors and terrorists. And there are many forms of aggression and terrorism. Let us not make the same mistakes and really take a rights-based approach.

The Indigenous peoples of the Americas have safeguarded the continent for many centuries now. Only 500 years after colonization, the whole planet is on the edge of environmental destruction. Still many governments want to put us aside, as if we are withholding development. What do you call self-determination development and all of the terms of words.

I call upon all participants to not only think about the words that we put into the Draft Declaration, but what you can or cannot do with these words. If you are here to make the Declaration stronger and show more respect for our rights, know that you have contributed towards harmonious societies in the Americas. Thank you.