



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA  
TO THE  
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

RESPONSE STATEMENT MADE BY D. CRITCHLOW, DELEGATE OF GUYANA  
AT THE MEETING TO PREPARE THE DRAFT AMERICAN DECLARATION  
ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
MARCH 11-15, 2002  
OAS HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, DC.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I am indeed grateful that we have extended the discussion on Article 13 - the right to environmental protection. Please let me state from the outset that Guyana supports not merely the principle of information but consultation of Indigenous peoples on the designation of Protected Areas.

Contrary to what has been stated earlier today by the representative of the Amerindian People's Association (APA) of Guyana in terms of the declaration of Protected Areas by the Government of Guyana, and specifically the lessons learnt and the benefits gained with reference to the Iwokrama Rainforest Area and the Kanaku Mountains, I take this opportunity to address two issues:

By the admission of the members of the surrounding indigenous communities, the Iwokrama Rainforest Project has brought tremendous benefits to their communities. These benefits include: training for the strengthening of their advocacy skills, the establishment of a Research Centre which focuses on researching the language, traditions, etc. of the Macushi people as well as the training of rangers to name a few benefits.

On the issue of the Kanaku Mountains, I wish to point out that this process is still at the stage of a proposal. In fact, the Government of Guyana in collaboration with Conservation International have been engaged in almost one year of consultations with the indigenous community. To date 17 of the 18 indigenous communities participate in these consultations and are involved in the development of the Management Plan.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, I wish to reiterate Guyana's support for, and commitment to both informing and consulting with indigenous communities on environmental and all other issues related to the affairs of Guyana.

I thank you.

Statement made Wednesday, March 13, 2002

Permanent Mission of Guyana to the OAS  
Washington, DC  
March 14, 2002

### **Intervention on Article XIII. para. 7**

My name is Kid James. I am from the Wapishana People and work with the Amerindian Peoples Association of Guyana.

My intervention deals specifically with paragraph 7 of Article 13. It is of great concern that States can declare an indigenous territory to be a protected area. Please permit me to justify my concerns by drawing your attention to two experiences of the indigenous peoples in Guyana with the setting up of Protected Areas on their traditional lands.

The first case relates to a pilot project for the Kaieteur National Park that was supported by the World Bank. This Park was sextended from 5 sq. miles to 242 sq. miles covering part of the Patamona people's traditional territory used for farming, hunting, fishing and gathering. Traveling through the extended area is the only way to get to the community. All these activities were prohibited by the law that govern the Park. No one was allowed to enter the extended area. This was done without even informing the Patomona community who only learnt of it through the news papers. This later led to the suspension of the World Bank project. Three years on the project is still struggling to get started again.

In the second experience a process was set up to establish a protected area in the Kanuku Mountains within the Wapishana and Macushi peoples territories. This process was developed by the government with assistance from Conservation International without participation of the affected communities. An attempt was then made to incorporate issues of the communities into the process and this failed miserably. For the communities land rights is the most important issue that needs to be dealt with immediately. It was soon learnt that the process could not deal with this issue and led to the suspension of the process. No solution has yet been met of how this issue will be addressed in the process

No one has gained from these bad experiences. The state gets nothing and the communities gain nothing. These experiences clearly indicate that a new approach is needed that fully involves affect communities and requires their free and informed consent when states are giving consideration to establishing protected areas on or near indigenous territories legally recognized or under claim. Most importantly, territorial rights issues must be resolved prior to any declaration of a protected area.

I would therefore like to support the language proposed by the National Congress of American Indians and others, which has been submitted in writing.

KID JAMES

Thanks you