



VIDS

Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname

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Fight for recognition of collective rights intensifies

As is well known, on 2 May there was an eruption in the vicinity of Pikin Saron, with violence being used, both by Indigenous activists and armed forces. Several people were killed and injured under dubious circumstances. In an emergency meeting with cluster ministers on 2 May, the Indigenous delegation consisting of representatives of VIDS and OSIP made the following demands:

1. Repeal of all land titles issued in Indigenous territories, with written evidence that they have indeed been withdrawn
2. Independent investigation into the circumstances of fatalities
3. State assistance in funeral expenses of the persons who have died
4. State assistance and guidance for survivors and victims
5. Release of those arrested who have been wrongfully or unlawfully arrested.

Other matters were also discussed during the emergency interview. This includes the immediate provision of “beschikkingen” (ministerial resolution) to new village authorities, and employment for the villages, including in their own area in which concessions have currently been wrongly issued. Furthermore, a rapid follow-up consultation was also requested to monitor the implementation of these matters.

To date, there has been no follow-up consultation nor substantive information. On the contrary, VIDS observes reports from the government side about “a gang” and “criminals”. Also that the government considers the eruption in the vicinity of Pikin Saron only as a criminal matter and refuses to take responsibility for what has occurred. On 4 May 2023, at the start of the debate on the Framework Law on Collective Rights, the President, who submitted the law to the National Assembly, left parliament. The vice president has been out of the picture for a long time. In the Assembly, a unilateral and incomplete overview has been given of orders issued to third parties within Indigenous residential and living areas in Para. Unknown surveyor maps were used as a reference. Assembly members of almost all political parties make statements that indicate that the legislator wants to keep the Framework Law on Collective Rights on the back burner, for example by sending it back to the government for adjustments, more discussions and/or further changes. The little attention that the government and parliament give to the full recognition and guarantee of the rights of the Indigenous people increases the legal uncertainty among the Indigenous peoples in Suriname. Meanwhile, VIDS receives disturbing reports of more than the officially named dead (2) and wounded as well as further heating among our Indigenous community and villagers feel criminalized. People fear for their lives because of possible police brutality. Others do not dare to talk about what they have seen. Women and men cannot leave their village for food.

VIDS emphasizes that the situation that has arisen in Pikin Saron and the surrounding area cannot be separated from the lack of legal recognition of the human rights of Indigenous peoples by the State of Suriname. The Kaliña & Lokono judgment of 2015 has not been respected, observed and implemented by successive governments, leaving Indigenous peoples to live in constant legal uncertainty. Land and

concessions are issued in Indigenous residential and habitat areas in violation of the judgment, putting the Indigenous peoples' livelihoods under pressure. With this behaviour, the State demonstrates its disregard for law and justice, thereby undermining the rule of law and the feeling among Indigenous people that they are not protected by law, justice and judicial bodies. Is it justified to expect Indigenous peoples to accept passively, decades in and decades out, that the State is acting in violation of their legitimate rights? Is that how the Surinamese rule of law functions? VIDS disapproves of non-compliance with laws and regulations, by both citizens and state bodies. That is why VIDS had counted on a different settlement, of the eruption at Pikin Saron, one that does more justice to the actual problem. But as the State continues to fail to comply with law and justice, VIDS will expand and intensify the struggle with national and especially international actions and denunciations against the ongoing denial and violation of the rights of Indigenous persons, communities and peoples. Explicit protection will be sought from the national and international community against this ongoing, increasingly brutal oppression and disregard by the State. At the same time, VIDS remains open to dialogue but will not wait for it.

Paramaribo, 7 May 2023

Lespeki gi wi leti, Fu Dati Wi E Feti!