



VIDS

Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden in Suriname

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Paramaribo, December 17, 2025

To:

- The President of the Republic of Suriname
- The Chairperson of the National Assembly
- The Minister of Land Policy and Forest Management (GBB)
- The Minister of Natural Resources (NH)
- The Minister of Oil, Gas, and the Environment
- The Minister of Public Works and Spatial Planning
- The Minister of Regional Development
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- The “international coalition” in support of nature conservation in Suriname¹

Subject: Concerns regarding the announced Sustainable Nature Management Act and the USD 20 million support for nature conservation in Suriname

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Suriname,
Your Excellency, the Chairperson of the National Assembly,
Excellencies, Ministers,
Esteemed representatives of the international coalition for nature conservation in Suriname,

The Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname ([VIDS](#)), as the body representing the Traditional Authority of all Indigenous peoples and communities in Suriname, has deemed it necessary to formally address you on the above-mentioned subject, in order to “sound the alarm” at this early stage (particularly since we have not previously been given the opportunity to do so). The most recent news article on this matter², together with the continued absence of any meaningful consultation with VIDS as the representative institution of Indigenous peoples in Suriname, has reinforced the impression that our rights and interests may be fundamentally at risk. This initiative should represent an opportunity rather than a threat, and we hope that this letter will serve as a starting point to bring about that shift.

Based on media reports, we understand that the financial support from the aforementioned coalition is intended, inter alia, to:

1. Maintain Suriname’s forest cover at a minimum of 90%;
2. Adopt the Sustainable Nature Management Act in 2025.

¹ According to a recent news report, this coalition consists of the organizations Re:wild (which serves as the lead organization), Rainforest Trust, Art into Acres, the Andes Amazon Fund, and the Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Foundation.

² <https://www.starnieuws.com/index.php/welcome/index/nieuwsitem/88656>

Re 1. Maintaining 90% forest cover

We fully support this objective. However, the manner and strategy by which this goal is to be achieved must be carefully discussed, and Indigenous peoples and communities must not become the victims—especially considering that it is precisely thanks to our centuries-old management systems and protection practices that these forests have been preserved to this day. This fact has already been acknowledged by the international community, and together with the rapidly growing awareness of the collective rights of Indigenous and Tribal peoples, it is now a binding requirement that nature conservation and management respect and promote our collective rights³.

The major problem is that the State of Suriname does not recognize these rights, nor does it legally recognize our existence as the original peoples of this country. As a result, we are “invisible” in legislation, policy, and practice; we can provide numerous examples of this if required. Even projects aimed at maintaining forest cover have already demonstrated that they do not sufficiently—or at all—take into account the rights of Indigenous and Tribal peoples, as evidenced by experiences with, among others, the entire REDD+ process since 2005, more recent ITMO initiatives, and applications to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Our involvement depends entirely on the “goodwill” of a president or minister—whether they wish to involve us, how, or not at all—and the painful reality is that we are not involved, let alone that our rights are respected. This represents only a small part of the **legal uncertainty and ongoing structural discrimination** that we have faced since colonial times and continue to face unabated since the independence of the Republic of Suriname.

Experience has further shown that nature conservation initiatives, however well-intentioned, follow the same pattern and do not work in our favor. On the contrary, projects are implemented that benefit others, while our communities are merely used—or even exploited—to secure funding. Structural changes fail to materialize, and we are expected to be satisfied with crumbs. So-called “bio-economy” initiatives and other appealing labels benefit those who are already integrated into the monetary economy and who can participate more quickly and effectively; instead of supporting our villages, they compete with them. We are currently witnessing the same situation with the promotion of so-called “local content” for the oil and gas industry, which will place increased pressure on our territories and natural resources, while others advance more rapidly and effectively, and our communities once again lag behind.

There is a significant risk that nature conservation initiatives may actually run counter to our rights and interests, precisely because these rights are not legally recognized and because

³ This is also reflected in the most recent judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the State of Suriname, namely the 2015 Kaliña & Lokono judgment, as well as in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, various decisions of other human rights instruments, decisions adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity (including the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the Paris Agreement and its Article 6 rules, the requirements of the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and related carbon credit mechanisms (UN-REDD+), and numerous other regional and international human rights and nature conservation treaties and funds.

there is neither a culture nor an obligation of effective participation and respect for the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in Suriname. There is often a lack of awareness of the internationally recognized rights of Indigenous peoples, or these rights are interpreted in an arbitrary and substandard manner.

We have also repeatedly experienced that national and international environmental organizations fail to fully or adequately inform our village leaders and thereby obtain their consent for projects (about which there is little transparency), while excluding VIDS or even going so far as to present non-representative organizations as “representatives” of Indigenous peoples in Suriname. This creates division and unrest within Indigenous society, and VIDS is repeatedly forced to make great efforts to preserve or restore unity. We can provide concrete examples of such situations if desired. Increased funding and additional projects under this initiative may therefore have counterproductive effects, regardless of good intentions.

Re 2. Sustainable Nature Management Act

The same situation of legal uncertainty and absence of legal protection for Indigenous peoples in Suriname applies equally—and even more strongly—to the development of legislation related to nature management. If our collective land rights, our right to self-determination and self-governance, our right to FPIC, our right to benefit-sharing, our right to traditional knowledge, and other collective rights are not yet legally recognized in accordance with international standards, then other laws such as the proposed Nature Management Act (in the drafting of which we have also not been effectively involved) will likewise remain substandard and may even pose a threat to the future recognition of our collective rights. For example, if additional nature reserves are established under the 30x30 objective, it may become even more difficult to subsequently establish Indigenous and Tribal land rights within those protected areas. We do not wish to believe that this could be the intention of such legislation. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights made a clear ruling in the *Kaliña & Lokono* judgment regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to the establishment of nature reserves. We will, in any event, protect our rights and assume that the State of Suriname will continue to respect the judgments of the Inter-American Court.

Your Excellencies,

We do not wish to continue “complaining,” nor are we opposed to constructive initiatives. On the contrary, time and again we seek engagement with successive governments in order to be effectively involved in policymaking and legislation—not as just one of many stakeholders in general stakeholder workshops, but as rights-holders with internationally recognized rights, in accordance with internationally recognized standards of participation and FPIC processes.

We are fully willing to further elaborate on our positions, which are also briefly reflected in the resolutions of the recent VIDS mini-conference that we previously submitted to you (attached again for your reference). Likewise, we are willing to help shape alternative and

more appropriate interpretations of the project opportunities created, so that they genuinely work in our favor and indeed represent an opportunity rather than a threat.

We look forward to your response and remain,

With the highest consideration,

The Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS)

On behalf of VIDS

Ms. Cylene France
Director Bureau VIDS