

Remarks by Ambassador Henry L. Mac Donald
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations
at the International Meeting of Small Island States on
“the Human Dimension of Climate Change”

13 – 14 November 2007

Male, Maldives

Thank you very much your Excellency,

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to express my heartfelt thanks to the Government and People of these beautiful Islands for their warm hospitality and the superb arrangements that have been made for this very important gathering, just weeks before the scheduled meeting in Bali, Indonesia next month.

I am also thankful for the immense efforts made to make our stay in the Maldives as pleasant and rewarding as possible and I do bring the greetings of President Runaldo Venetiaan to President Maumoon Gayoom of the Maldives.

Mr. Chairman,

The current international scene predominantly speaks about the devastating effects of climate change. The recent findings of the “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change” has explicitly confirmed the warming of our climate system, and clearly linked it to human activity.

Today, the international community more than ever before offers scientific evidence to indicate and proof that human activity in many ways continues to contribute to the deteriorating situation of the global climate.

Finding effective and permanent solutions may not be easy, since many of these activities relates to our ways and standards of living and our aspirations.

However, the global community will not be able to present an adequate and responsible response to climate change and global warming, if it is not able to look beyond the short term gains and benefits.

Known for its richness in natural resources and amidst the growing worldwide urge to exploit its natural resources, the Government of Suriname finds itself in the position to reevaluate the balance between economic development and thus, the

improvement of the welfare and well-being of its people on one hand and protection of the nation's vast environment on the other.

As a low-lying coastal state the Republic of Suriname like many other nations is already severely being affected by the dangers of climate change. The flooding in the interior last year and its effects on the indigenous and maroon communities is still fresh in our memory.

Mr. Chairman,

While recognizing that a global response is required to address climate change, and facing the need as a developing country to grow its economy, Suriname has taken and continues to take action for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Suriname's vast and intact Amazon rainforest resources represent a critical asset base for global climate change mitigation. Although increased pressures for commercial timber exploitation, Suriname has deliberately decided to maintain extensive portions of its rainforest. Presently, almost 80 percent of Suriname's rainforest is still in its pristine state of which approximately one million hectares is under direct conservation.

Suriname's forest resources therefore represent a critical asset base for global climate change mitigation. However we should be aware that these unilateral efforts on deforestation will only be successful if economically viable alternatives are being offered for countries as my own. **It will therefore be critical to press the case for new incentives at the Bali Conference, to reward not only re-planting of forest trees but also preservation of pristine forests.**

Mr. Chairman,

We all should by now be aware of the fact that the phenomenon of climate change is way more than environmental, more than technical, more than financial, and more than even political.

Climate change is first and foremost a human issue, because it basically endangers human prosperity and the enjoyment of human rights and human survival.

My delegation therefore fully agrees with H.E. President Gaymoon when he yesterday called on the international community to put the human dimension of climate change at the heart of the climate change discussion. We the member states of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) should make all efforts in ensuring that the international community copes with climate change as a vital necessity in order to safeguard basic human rights and prosperity for all.

The fundamental correlation between climate change and human rights is essentially that everyone has the right to live in a safe, secure, healthy, clean and sustainable environment.

If such a principle is affected by human induced climate change, it will negatively affect a range of internationally recognized and fundamental human rights.

National and international action on climate change should therefore be more than the implementation or promotion of environmental policies.

Mr. Chairman,

The member states of the United Nations have universally pledged to safeguard and promote universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as is reflected in the International Bill of Human Rights, as well as several other international human rights and environmental instruments, such as the recently adopted Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol.

The clear linkages between protection of human rights and protection of the environment have long been recognized in several instruments. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment for instance declared that "man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights--even the right to life itself."

Although many countries, along with various international instruments now particularly recognize the human right to an environment capable of supporting human society and the enjoyment of human rights, there is nonetheless no explicit international legal framework that recognizes climate change as such. The call for a comprehensive instrument by the President of Maldives is therefore prudent since the environmental problem has become for many of us a matter of live and death.

For many small low lying coastal states and particularly those small island states in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean, the dangers of climate change are immediate.

Our small size, remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragile ecosystems, low lying coasts, constraints on transportation and communication and for many of us the lack of freshwater supply, mean that we are extremely vulnerable to even the smallest changes to the global climate.

Just as the integrity of our states is threatened, so are the rights of our peoples to a safe and secure home and the enjoyment of their most basic and fundamental rights as human beings.

Our ultimate goal at the Bali Conference therefore must be to find consensus on a comprehensive agreement under the UNFCCC process. An agreement that should

address climate change on all fronts, including adaptation, mitigation, clean technologies, deforestation, human rights and resource mobilization.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation views this occasion as a historic and unique opportunity to put the issue regarding the “Human Dimension of Global Climate Change” once and for all as a priority matter on the global agenda, it is for that reason that we express solidarity with the “Conference-Statement” on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change.

Thank you.