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the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1614th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 23 February 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. YUTZIS

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 6)

Initial to tenth periodic reports of Suriname (CERD/C/446/Add.1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.39/Rev.1; CERD/C/62/Dec/3, list of questions by the Rapporteur)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of Suriname took their places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. LIMON (Suriname), introducing his country's tenth periodic report, said that Suriname's past failure to report to the Committee on the measures it had taken to give effect to the Convention was attributable to the military rule to which it had been subjected from 1980 to 1987 and to the second military coup d'état of 1990, which had destroyed the nation's fragile return to democracy in the intervening period.
3. He drew the Committee's attention to a number of facts concerning Suriname's geographical location, the multi-ethnic composition of its population and the main exports of its small-scale economy. He also provided a brief overview of Suriname's general political and legal structure in order to emphasize the importance attached by the Government to the principles of democracy, equality and equal opportunity for all citizens.
4. Since its inception in 1975 as an independent and sovereign State, Suriname had assumed responsibility for promoting the observance and protection of the principles contained in the various human rights instruments to which it was a party. Moreover, its Constitution had incorporated numerous provisions that gave effect to the rights arising from those principles, which included personal rights and freedoms, as well as social, economic and cultural rights. Violations of fundamental rights were referred to the ordinary courts and there were plans to establish a Constitutional Court to ensure that domestic legislation was in conformity with the Constitution.
5. The Government of Suriname was committed to maintaining an open and transparent policy, in which the enjoyment of human rights by its citizens was a main priority. To that effect, it had adopted a policy aimed at eliminating all forms of racial discrimination. The definition of racial discrimination used in the Convention had been incorporated into both the Constitution and the Criminal Code. The latter also contained provisions for the punishment of discrimination. Moreover, the recently promulgated General Monetary Sanctions Act had significantly increased the penalty for discriminatory acts.
6. The Government had not yet adopted special measures to promote the cultural advancement of particular racial or ethnic groups. It did not have data indicating that particular ethnic groups or individuals needed special protection in order to enjoy or exercise their human rights, but would take such measures if they were deemed necessary.
7. The majority of the indigenous peoples and Maroons lived in the hinterlands of Suriname and enjoyed privileges that residents of the coastal areas did not, such as the harvesting of timber and other forest products for private use. However, since woodcutting licences were registered

in the name of the village chiefs, they had retained control over the corresponding rights and revenues and villagers were not benefiting sufficiently from their community forests. The Government was aware of the problem and needed to take appropriate action through the leaders of the seven Maroon and indigenous groups.

8. Responding to the questions put by the Country Rapporteur on the tenth periodic report of Suriname, he indicated that the results of the May 2003 census were not available because the General Bureau of Statistics had burnt down in August 2003. Details concerning the ethnic composition of the population and the distribution of ethnic groups by district were therefore not available either. The State was currently compiling statistics on the distribution of the general population by district and would forward that information to the Committee as soon as it was ready.

9. Concerning the status given to the Convention in domestic legislation, he referred the Committee to articles 103, 104 and 105 of the Constitution of Suriname. Article 105 stipulated that the provisions of the Convention could not be invoked directly before the courts. However, since the Convention was considered to be part of domestic legislation, the judiciary could decide what status to afford a particular provision in the Convention.

10. Although the Constitutional Court had not yet been established, the bill to establish the Court was currently before the National Assembly. Despite the lack of a constitutional court, the judiciary was competent to disregard domestic legislation that did not comply with the provisions of the Constitution.

11. Ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries was being considered by the Government through its Ministry of Labour, Technological Development and Environment. With the assistance of consultants from the ILO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), that department had organized several meetings for government officials and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the field of indigenous rights to discuss the issue. Information on the content of Convention No. 169 had been provided to several indigenous groups in accordance with article 11 of the 1992 Peace Accord and a debate on Convention No. 169 had been initiated.

12. With regard to the 1992 Peace Accord and the economic and social development of the regions of the interior, the Government had implemented a development plan that included the provision of medical services to the interior through the Regional Health Service. Such services were provided in cooperation with private institutions, such as the Medical Mission (Medische Zending). In May 1995, the Government had established the Council for the Development of the Interior in accordance with the 1992 Peace Accord. In July 2003, new members nominated by the traditional authorities of the indigenous peoples and the Maroons were appointed to the Council.

13. Telesur, a State-owned telecommunication company, had begun providing a telephone service to the interior in three populous areas. It had drafted project proposals for the development of other areas and had submitted them to the institutions concerned. A leaflet describing the status of telecommunications in the interior would be made available to the Committee.

14. As part of a comprehensive plan of action for education in the interior, the Government had introduced a special training programme for teachers for the interior, including computer training and region-specific curricula. Moreover, it had renovated schools and teachers' houses, built additional classrooms and planned to introduce a distance-learning programme in the region, in cooperation with Telesur. The Government also planned to re-introduce a rule stipulating that all graduates of teacher training colleges were required to serve in hinterland schools for three years. Some 200 graduates were currently working in such schools.

15. With regard to the progress made in implementing the 1992 Peace Accord, in terms of granting indigenous and tribal peoples title to land, there was currently a wide-ranging discussion under way within the Ministry of Regional Development and several national and international conferences had been held. Some of the complicating factors included the definitions given to indigenous people, tribal people and Maroons; the determination of the economic zones for people living in a particular area; and the fact that different tribes and ethnic groups lived relatively close to one another.

16. The Samaraka people had filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in which they claimed that their rights to land and resources had been violated. The Government was aware of the importance of that issue and was determined to deal with it in a satisfactory manner. Although the Government recognized the special relationship the indigenous and tribal peoples had with the land they lived on, it was required to base its policy on the Constitution, which stated that all natural resources belonged to the State and were to be used for the benefit of all Surinamese citizens. Mechanisms and procedures to deal with the granting of land concessions expressly stipulated that the district commissioner should consult the population whose economic zone was located in the area in which a concession was being requested. He should then obtain the approval of the head of the tribal or indigenous community before advising the Minister of Natural Resources regarding the request.

17. In response to the question concerning whether indigenous and tribal peoples had effective remedies allowing them to secure recognition of and respect for their lands, such remedies were provided in domestic legislation. Citizens who believed that their rights had been infringed upon could file a complaint with the judiciary, although they seldom exercised that right. In the event of damage to the environment, it was necessary to file a petition with the judiciary in order to seek remedy.

18. A new mining law was being drafted and a copy of the bill would be provided to the Committee. Since bills were required to be approved by the National Assembly, elected representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples in that body had the possibility of expressing their opinion on the bill.

19. One of the main recommendations formulated to resolve the problem of mercury poisoning of the population in the interior concerned the promotion of cooperation among all stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels. The Government was considering establishing an association of small-scale gold miners, which would make communication and consultation easier. Other recommendations included the formulation of a comprehensive plan to raise awareness and to educate workers about the risks of gold mining, to provide training in alternative mining techniques, to carry out research and monitoring, to establish a national platform for information and training and to seek foreign technical expertise and support.

20. Although the Government had received complaints regarding the impact of the exploitation of natural resources in the interior through the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Maroons and indigenous people had never officially lodged a complaint with the national authorities. Therefore the Government took the view that all domestic remedies had not been exhausted.

21. The Government did not consider that the economic exploitation of the lands of indigenous and tribal peoples had consequences for their cultural rights. The members of those groups had influenced their own culture by inviting foreigners into their territory. An anthropological study should be conducted to determine the nature of the problem and how to resolve it.

22. The participation of all peoples in the life of their communities depended upon their education and training. Although the people of the interior region had a gap to bridge, that gap was quickly narrowing. As shown in the statistics included in the attachment to the tenth periodic report, there had been a rise in the number of Maroon and indigenous persons who occupied staff positions in their communities. The participation, election of leaders and access to staff positions in the respective communities of such peoples was based on their own cultural and historical structures, which were respected by the Government.

23. Although most political parties had historically been established and organized on an ethnic basis, that had never been formally included in the statutes of the parties, nor included in any law. In principle, political parties were open to everyone. Since the Constitution prohibited discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, it was unlawful for political organizations to admit only members of a particular ethnic group. In fact, the current trend was towards multi-ethnic political parties.

24. Debate on the 1973 Marriage Act had eventually resulted in the introduction of a new Marriage Act. Whilst no complaints had been made to the authorities, discussions in religious organizations and other ethnic communities were currently taking place. It was therefore possible that practical objections might be raised at some stage.

25. The new Marriage Act could be seen as a first step towards establishing a uniform age of consent to marriage at 18 for all ethnic groups, including Amerindians and Maroons. The Government, whilst wanting to ensure such uniformity, recognized that it was an ethnic and cultural issue that required sensitive handling. The State respected the culture and practice of all the ethnic groups in Surinamese society. Following the introduction of the new Marriage Act, the State believed that marriages solemnized without the consent of the woman, reportedly practised on occasion by some ethnic groups, no longer occurred. Moreover, the Government offered women information and training sessions on those issues in close collaboration with non-governmental women's organizations and the media.

26. Regarding the racial segregation still visible in several areas of the capital, the policy of successive governments had been to issue houses and land to people from different racial backgrounds in order to increase integration of the diverse population and enable all citizens to live in peace and harmony with one another. The State was thus attempting to minimize the effects of the racial segregation established by the Dutch colonizers.

27. The domestic legislative instruments corresponding to article 4 (b) of the Convention were articles 175, 175 (a) and 176 of the Criminal Code, as listed on page 23 of the report.
28. The human rights violations committed during the civil conflict between 1985 and 1991 were still under investigation. The judicial authorities were currently investigating the Moiwana massacre, which had taken place in 1986, prior to Suriname's accession to the American Convention on Human Rights. The position regarding those events had been brought before the American Commission on Human Rights and once the investigations had been completed, the State would not hesitate to prosecute those responsible.
29. Regarding the promotion of the use of languages other than Dutch in the education system, in the more remote areas of Suriname where people were less fluent in Dutch, children were being taught in Sranan Tongo at primary school. That helped bridge the linguistic gap as Sranan Tongo was the language most commonly spoken in the home. There were, however, no plans to promote the use of Sranan Tongo in the educational system overall, as Dutch was still the official language of the country. Beginning the teaching of English at an earlier stage had been suggested, in view of the globalization process and the accession of Suriname to various international and regional organizations and systems.
30. Regarding the difficulties and apparent contradictions between the development of the nation and respect for the cultural rights of members of various communities, the State acknowledged the cultural rights of all ethnic groups and would take them into account when formulating and implementing policies. Development of the whole nation implied development for all citizens of the nation, thus also for the various ethnic groups, including the indigenous communities and the Maroons.
31. Measures taken to protect the cultural heritage of the various ethnic groups and to promote mutual awareness included the Government-led initiative to publish a weekly schedule of cultural events in a local newspaper.
32. In conclusion, he thanked the Chairman and Committee members and assured them that the Government of Suriname would continue its efforts to improve the protection and enjoyment of all human rights.
33. Mr. DE GOUTTES (Country Rapporteur) thanked the delegation for coming to the meeting, since it was the Committee's aim to establish a dialogue with all States parties and to ensure cooperation with them. Despite the fact that Suriname had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1985, the report under discussion was the first to have been presented to the Committee. The situation in Suriname had therefore been considered under a review procedure in 1997 and again in March 2003 under urgent action procedures, which had concluded that serious violations of the rights of indigenous communities, particularly the Maroons and the Amerindians, were being committed in Suriname (CERD/C/62/Dec.3). It was therefore necessary to analyse whether the current report, submitted by Suriname in July 2003, together with the Core Document (HRI/Core/1/Add.39/Rev.1) and the delegate's answers to his questions, had adequately responded to the Committee's concerns expressed in the 2003 decision.

34. The report provided a partial response to some of those concerns. Insufficient detail, however, was given on the daily reality of life in Suriname, especially for the indigenous and tribal populations. Whilst there were many positive aspects to the report, questions still remained on several general issues as well as on the specific implementation of articles 1 to 7 of the Convention. Those questions were based on information provided in reports Suriname had submitted to various United Nations Treaty Monitoring Bodies, Suriname's Rio +10 assessment and data provided by other United Nations Bodies, regional organizations and NGOs.

35. After summarizing Suriname's current demographic composition, with particular reference to its multi-ethnicity and multilingualism, he expressed concern about the illegal emigration of large numbers of Surinamese nationals to neighbouring countries, particularly French Guyana. The voluntary repatriation and reintegration programme for Surinamese refugees from French Guyana had not been as successful as was hoped, particularly for men. As a result, many families were living in poverty.

36. Regarding the status of the Convention in domestic legislation, the Committee would like to know whether Suriname planned to make a declaration recognizing the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals, under article 14 of the Convention. He would also appreciate information on when a constitutional court was to be established in Suriname and the difficulties that had been encountered during the establishment process.

37. On the subject of international conventions, the reporting State was advised to ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

38. With regard to article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, he commended the delegation on the definition of racial discrimination included in the Constitution of Suriname and its Criminal Code, which was in line with the definition given in article 1 of the Convention. It would be interesting to learn whether Suriname planned to introduce the special provisions referred to in article 1, paragraph 4 of the Convention to secure adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups requiring particular protection.

39. Under article 2 of the Convention, the Committee would welcome more information on the plan mentioned in the report (para. 81) to reduce the arrears of education in the interior. In particular, details on whether such a plan had been adopted and the progress that had been made on implementing a network of educational centres in the interior would be appreciated. In addition, the reporting State should clarify whether the composition of the Council for the Development of the Interior reflected the multi-ethnicity of Suriname and how that was monitored.

40. The provisions of the Criminal Code of Suriname (paras. 107-115) were, on the whole, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention. The reporting State should, however, clarify what legislation was in place to prohibit organizations which promoted and incited racial discrimination and to recognize participation in such organizations as an offence punishable by law.

41. Regarding the rights mentioned in article 5 of the Convention, the Committee's decision of March 2003 and information from other sources suggested that discrimination against the indigenous and tribal populations in Suriname was still prevalent. The Committee would appreciate statistical information on the level of participation in public life by the population of the interior, the Maroons and the indigenous population, particularly regarding policy development, community life and access to roles of responsibility. In addition, the Committee was concerned by reports of discrimination against groups of vulnerable children, especially those living in the interior, and the increasing number of children of both sexes that were victims of sexual exploitation.

42. Additional information would also be welcomed by the Committee on the measures the Government had taken to stop the forced displacement of tribal and indigenous people due to mining and forestry activities.

43. Despite legislative and constitutional protection of tribal and indigenous peoples' economic, social and cultural rights, socio-economic indicators pointed to the existence of discrimination against those groups. Increasing prevalence of malaria and sexually transmitted infections was cause for concern, as were the ill effects of mercury contamination and water pollution. Illiteracy rates in the interior were high, and indigenous women and children suffered particularly from the lack of education. Suriname should ensure that parents from the most vulnerable sections of society were not burdened with excessive school running costs. The Government should do more to promote the use of local languages in schools, particularly Sranan Tongo, which was spoken by the majority of the population; it should also do more to protect the native languages of the various indigenous communities. The Committee wished to know what measures were already in place to improve access to education in the interior of Suriname.

44. The indigenous peoples of Suriname, who represented approximately 14 per cent of the population, lived predominantly in the rural and forested areas of the country, which covered 80 per cent of the territory and were the source of the majority of Suriname's natural resources. Although the Government had stated in the report that Suriname's natural resources must be used for the benefit of the whole nation, and that it would not hesitate to take corrective measures if it learned of acts that had taken place in the interior, he noted with regret that the Government had not yet taken specific steps to address the problem of exposure to mercury contamination (paras. 91-92).

45. He drew attention to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people (E/CN.4/2003/90, para. 90), which indicated that indigenous and tribal lands, territories and resources were not recognized by Surinamese law and that many indigenous and Maroon communities had suffered the consequences of gold mining activities carried out without their prior consent or their involvement. Several villages had been displaced against the wishes of their inhabitants and the environment had been damaged, which had affected their traditional subsistence economy. Similar concerns had been expressed by the Human Rights Committee. He wished to know the nature of the recommendations made by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights with regard to the

petition submitted to it with complaints from 12 tribes living in 58 villages concerning the fact that forestry or mining concessions had been granted on Saramaka land without consent, causing irreparable damage to the environment. He also requested further information about a number of similar threats facing indigenous and tribal peoples in Suriname.

46. He asked whether the provisions of the 1992 Peace Accord of Lelydorp and the 2001 Buskondre Dey Protocol had been implemented and whether they had proved effective in protecting indigenous and tribal populations from environmental damage caused by forestry and mining exploitation. He also asked what mechanisms existed to allow such communities to participate in decisions affecting their lands and natural resources, whether studies of the impact on the environment and on the groups concerned were mandatory, what initiatives had been undertaken to delimit and register the lands occupied and traditionally used by the Amerindians and the Maroons, and what position the Government held with regard to collective ownership of land. He asked whether indigenous and tribal peoples had effective means of recourse to ensure that their lands and ancestral resources were respected, and to appeal if necessary against permits granted for activities on those lands and whether they were entitled to compensation in the event of damage to their environment. He asked whether indigenous and tribal peoples were considered to have legal personality under Surinamese law. He also asked whether new legislation on mining was being drafted, and, if so, what the content of that legislation was. He also wished to know whether the Government planned to consult with indigenous and tribal peoples on the matter.

47. The Committee would be interested to know what stage the draft legislation for restructuring of the judiciary (para. 183) had reached. The report did not contain any practical information about how anti-discrimination legislation was implemented. Although the Government had stated in the report that there had been no specific cases of persons propagating violent behaviour towards others simply because of race, ethnicity or religion (para. 207), no country was free of racist acts. The existence of legislation against racism was not in itself enough; it also needed to be applied effectively. He therefore wished to know the statistics for complaints, prosecutions, sentences and compensation awarded to victims with regard to racial discrimination. In particular, he wished to know what action had been taken with respect to the massacre at the village of Moiwana in 1986 and the extrajudicial executions of civilian Maroons at Atjoni and Tjon Galanga Pasi in 1987. He also wished to know how prosecutions relating to human rights violations perpetrated during the civil war of 1985-1991 had been affected by the 1992 Amnesty Act.

48. He asked what measures had been taken to raise public awareness of the Convention and the degree of publicity that would be accorded to the Government's presentation of its report before the Committee. He asked whether civil servants and the police received human rights training. Lastly, he asked whether the Government had consulted with non-governmental organizations in compiling the report and invited Suriname to submit written replies to his questions, or to include its answers in their eleventh periodic report.

49. Mr. PILLAI asked how the multi-ethnic nature of the population influenced equality and equal opportunities policy. He asked what measures were in place to enhance social and economic development within ethnic groups and to ensure that Suriname's ethnic diversity was properly reflected in State bodies. Merely recognizing the existence of a right was not enough; it

was also important to create a favourable environment and to empower vulnerable groups. He asked whether there was a pattern to the way the various ethnic groups were geographically distributed.

50. In the context of encouraging investment, Suriname should consider imposing on investors a condition encouraging them to create opportunities for health and education facilities, with a view to redressing problems identified in Suriname's reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. He asked whether any cases had been brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, of which Suriname was a State party, and said that Suriname should consider giving legal status to the traditional rights of indigenous peoples.

51. Mr. VALENCIA RODRÍGUEZ asked whether Suriname had any plans to adopt special measures to secure adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals that required protection (para. 72), and recalled that women were often subjected to double discrimination. In the context of varying fees charged in different schools, Suriname should work to reduce the burden on the most disadvantaged groups. Children's education merited particular attention, not least in relation to the question of instruction in indigenous languages. He asked for more detailed information about the situation of Amerindians and Maroons and wished to know the Government's response to the Committee's Decision 3 (62) (CERD/C/62/Dec.3). He would appreciate information about the possible ratification of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization.

52. More detailed information was required about Suriname's implementation of the specific articles of the Convention, particularly article 7. Suriname should work to bring its legislation into even closer conformity with the Convention, in particular by bringing its Criminal Code into line with paragraph 4 (b) of the Convention. The Government should ensure that the use of certificates of transfer of domicile did not lead to discriminatory practices. He asked what measures were in place to ensure the provision of appropriate housing. Although the Government had reported no cases of racially motivated violence, he urged it to remain vigilant.

53. Mr. KJAERUM requested further information about how the most vulnerable groups were integrated into society. He asked what steps had been taken to recognize traditional indigenous and Maroon authorities within the national structure of Government. He also asked whether Suriname had considered affirmative action to ensure proportional participation of indigenous and tribal peoples in Government. He asked whether it was still the case that Maroon marriages, unlike Asian, Hindu and Muslim marriages, did not enjoy legal status; if so, he asked whether the new Marriage Act would rectify the situation and whether any interim measures had been put in place.

54. He asked whether any attempt had been made to merge customary laws with national law. He wished to draw the delegation's attention to the Committee's general recommendation XXV on gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination. Further to the Government's stated intention (para. 183) to establish a special court of human rights, he asked whether it had any plans to establish a national human rights commission, which would be able to address complaints, run public-information campaigns and advise the Government on legislative matters. Lastly, he asked whether the report had been compiled in consultation with non-governmental organizations and indigenous groups.

55. Mr. THORNBERRY said that regarding social and cultural rights, active measures by the State were required in order to allow minority cultures to sustain themselves. An evaluation of the real life situations of minority groups was a prerequisite to such measures. Efforts should therefore be made to gather accurate statistics on the social and cultural situations of minority groups. The use of the term “privileges” (para. 97), in reference to the recognition of minority rights, was inappropriate as it suggested that certain minority groups were given unfair preferential treatment. The recognition of rights was not a privilege. Regarding segregation, the Government should take paragraph 3 of the Committee’s general recommendation XIX into account.

56. He wished to know which specific “universal instruments” (para. 208) were integrated into the Government’s policies on education. Measures should be taken to incorporate indigenous and tribal languages into the national education system. He asked whether Suriname accepted the proposition found within International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 that the traditional use of land gave rise to international rights. He also asked whether indigenous peoples and minority groups were represented fairly in instances where public interest was taken into consideration.

57. Mr. TANG Chengyuan wished to know whether the State took the interests of local people into account in its use of land and resources, in particular whether indigenous people were granted compensation if the State’s use of land and resources disrupted their lives. Had any measures been taken to rectify the health and environmental problems caused by gold-mining? Suriname’s legislation on minority groups was commendable, but further information was necessary on the implementation of such legislation. He asked how the Criminal Code provided for the investigation of cases of racial discrimination, and under what circumstances racial discrimination was punishable by law.

58. Mr. SICILIANOS said that Suriname’s efforts to encourage different ethnic communities to live together peacefully were to be commended. Such efforts had been successful among majority groups. However, according to international monitoring bodies such as the Organization of American States, minority groups in Suriname still did not have the full constitutional recognition necessary to maintain peace. That notwithstanding, the Government considered such groups to be “privileged” (para. 97). He wished to know on what grounds that view was held by the Government and the majority of the population.

59. Mr. CALITZAY asked how the timber and mining industries affected indigenous and tribal communities. He requested further information on the number of consultations held between the Government and indigenous and tribal communities before granting mining and forestry permits, and what measures were being taken with respect to the recognition of indigenous authorities.

60. Mr. AVTONOMOV asked what legal status was held by tribal and indigenous peoples. Were measures being taken to investigate human rights violations in remote areas of the country, and did the Government intend to establish inspection bodies for that purpose? Had the Government consulted non-governmental organizations on that subject?

61. He asked whether the political parties that had taken part in the most recent elections in Suriname were mono- or multi-ethnic. Although the Suriname Constitution stipulated that all children had the right to free education (para. 164), paragraph 77 of the report listed the fees charged by schools in the country. Were there any circumstances under which education was indeed free of charge?

62. Mr. HERNDL asked why the Constitutional Court of Suriname had still not been created, despite the fact that a bill had been ready for submission to the National Assembly in 1998. Suriname's Criminal Code only provided for the punishment of specific acts of racial discrimination. Participation in organizations inciting racial hatred should also be made a punishable offence. The Government should consider making a declaration under article 14 of the Convention. Moreover, Suriname had not ratified the amendment concerning article 8 of the Convention, adopted in 1992. The country's ratification of the Convention was therefore considered to be incomplete, and ratifying that amendment should be a government priority.

63. Ms. JANUARY-BARDILL requested a more detailed explanation of the term "cultural democracy" used in the report (paras. 70 and 78) and in particular of how such a democracy dealt with issues of race. She wished to know what measures were being taken to solve the structural problems affecting minority groups, such as the lack of access to social and economic rights and political freedoms.

64. Mr. LINDGREN ALVES asked whether it was indeed true that there were no specific cases of violent behaviour due to race, ethnicity or religion, as stated in paragraph 207 of the report. He also asked whether there were any specific cases of rights of access to public places being violated due to racial prejudice. The current marriage system, which provided for several types of marriage based on religion, should be replaced by one general system of civil marriages, in order to prevent distinction and discrimination between ethnic and religious groups.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.