



April 1, 2004

The Government of Suriname, through
The Minister of Natural Resources
The Minister of Regional Development
The Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation

Dear Ministers,

Through this email message, the Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) has the honor and pleasure of presenting to the Government of Suriname the following recommendation with regard to the formulation of policy re “Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons” and “Management of Protected Areas.”

We are pleased to inform you that ACT has been joined recently by Juan Carlos Riascos de la Peña, former Director of Colombia’s National Parks Service and former President of the National Parks Association of South America. Juan Carlos functions as ACT’s Vice-President for Field Programs.

During Juan Carlos’ first visit to Suriname (March 8-16, 2004), it became evident to all of us that he has a wealth of experience directly related to the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, he is willing and interested in sharing these experiences and insights to with Surinamese authorities and Indigenous Peoples/Maroons in the hopes that his ideas will help the Surinamers formulate some potential win-win solutions to the challenges they are all facing in terms of the land rights issues. In fact, Juan Carlos discussed some of these ideas based on the Colombian experience during his presentation on “Management of Protected Areas” at the Nature Conservation Division (LBB/NB) on March 12, in a meeting with Mr. S. Chandoe, representative of Director I. Rambharse of PLOS, on March 9, and in a meeting with Mr. I. Taus, representative of Director J. Abdul of Natural Resources, on March 15.

It is with this in mind that ACT, within its overall collaboration with Indigenous Peoples/Maroons and the Government of Suriname, and more specifically within its commitment to continue its support to the Government of Suriname and the Indigenous Peoples/Maroons in the process towards helping solve the land rights issue (a commitment expressed for the first time at the presentation of the Kwamalasamutu map in April, 2001), respectfully recommends to the Government of Suriname:

1 – The Government of Suriname assigns a commission of Government officers (NH, RO, PLOS) to act as counterpart for Juan Carlos Riascos.

2 – Juan Carlos Riascos will share in-depth with this counterpart commission the experience which he considers relevant to Suriname.

3 – Juan Carlos Riascos will advise the counterpart commission on formulation of a strategy/action plan towards formulation/preparation of Policy and related Institutional Framework and Legislation, with regard to “Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons” and “Management of Protected Areas.” It will appear that there is reason for mentioning these two issues together, especially when dealing with Indigenous Peoples in remote border regions.

In order not to leave you second-guessing with regard to “the message of Juan Carlos,” it is deemed necessary to mention the following aspects of said message:

- Granting land rights to Indigenous Peoples/Maroons, is not just a matter of rights, but a combination of rights and obligations.
- In granting land rights to Indigenous Peoples/Maroons, the sovereignty of the State would not be jeopardized – in fact, it would be strengthened. In border regions, the win-win situation with rights and obligations of the Indigenous Peoples/Maroons will actually foster a reinforcement of the sovereignty of the State.
- It is recommended that a joint delegation of representatives of the Government and of the Indigenous Peoples/Maroons make an orientation trip to one or more countries (starting with Colombia) to see successes and failures of efforts to solve the issue of land rights of Indigenous peoples/Maroons.

ACT is convinced that this assistance will make an important and positive contribution to the efforts by the Government of Suriname to solve the challenging issues of “Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons” and re “Management of Protected Areas,” and is therefore looking forward to your positive response to this recommendation.

Finally, please be informed that ACT’s Suriname Program Director, Neville Gunther, will be available to further discuss/explain this recommendation in person from April 2-7. Contact info: Stichting ACT Suriname, Hugostraat 13; phone numbers 463526, 531643, 531668; fax 463526; email actsur@sr.net

Sincerely,



Mark J. Plotkin, Ph.D.
President