

**Introductory remarks of H.E. Kenneth Amoksi, minister of justice and police and Head of Delegation for the consideration of the National Report of the republic of Suriname to**

**the Human Rights Council**

**November 1, 2021 - Geneva, Switzerland**

Madam President,

Esteemed Members of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Representatives of the UN Member States,

Representatives of the Civil Society, Observers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Suriname, I express appreciation for the opportunity to present Suriname’s third cycle UPR national report and my delegation looks forward to a frank and constructive dialogue with the Members of this Esteemed Council.

At the outset, my delegation would also like to take the opportunity to reiterate the continued commitment of the Government of Suriname for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in Suriname.

Suriname also remains committed to the promotion of democracy, good governance and strengthening of the rule of law, as a fundamental framework for economic prosperity, sustained peace and international cooperation.

**Madam President,**

Suriname recognizes the valuable contribution of the United Nations Human Rights system and in particular the UPR mechanism in the observance and the protection of human rights.

In this context the reporting obligations originating in the various human rights instruments are considered an opportunity to assess national achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as to address remaining challenges.

Suriname continued its cooperation with the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations through several capacity building activities, aiming at improved implementation and reporting under several Conventions, amongst others covering civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and rights of children, women and persons with disabilities.

In addition, there has been close cooperation with UN agencies and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in preparation of interactive dialogues with human rights mechanisms.

I also recall the recent participation of a delegate in the 48th regular session of the Human Rights Council through the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to support the participation of the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States in the work of the Council.

Suriname looks forward to the continued and increased cooperation with the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, the UPR mechanism and other international and regional bodies in its endeavors to ensure that the rights and freedoms of all that are present within the territory of Suriname are observed.

**Madam President,**

The UPR report of Suriname for the third cycle was prepared in consultation with various stakeholders, including civil society and NGOs.

With regard to the implementation of the 148 recommendations received during our UPR in 2016, progress has been achieved in the adoption and strengthening of the national legal framework to further support implementation of national policy and development plans, as well as relevant international commitments.

In the past five years Suriname ratified several human rights instruments, including:

* the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
* ILO Conventions No. 100 on Equal Remuneration,
* No.111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), and
* No.138 on Minimum Age.

**Recent achievements include:**

* The accession of the Republic of Suriname to the UN Convention Against Corruption, based on the Presidential Act of 23 July 2021, that endorses the law approving the accession of the Republic of Suriname to this Convention.
* The accession of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), following the tacit approval by Parliament in October 2021 and the Presidential Act of 20 October 2021 that endorses the accession of Suriname to the UNCAT.

The instruments of accession to both the UN Convention Against Corruption and the Convention Against Torture have been prepared for submission to the respective depositaries. The formal submission will take place shortly.

* Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Suriname deposited the relevant Instrument of Ratification in May 2012, but yet had to deposit the Declaration that sets forth the minimum age at which it will permit voluntary recruitment into its national armed forces and a description of the safeguards it has adopted to ensure that such recruitment is not forced or coerced.

The formal submission of this declaration to the depositary will take place shortly.

* In addition Suriname has abolished the death penalty in the Military Penal Code last August, following its abolishment in the Penal Code in 2015.

This progress allows Suriname to take further steps towards ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

**Madam President,**

Please allow me to address some of the advance questions, posed by the distinguished representatives of the United States of America, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Germany, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Panama and Belgium.

I would like to state beforehand that based on the topics, questions have been clustered for the sake of efficiency.

**National Human Rights Institute**

Suriname has a decree regarding the Human Rights Institute which dates from before the Paris principles were adopted.

A working group consisting of Human Rights experts and the Government is currently working on revision of this decree and drafting a law that will allow the Human Rights Institute to function in accordance with the Paris Principles.

Civil society will also be consulted in this regard. Throughout this process awareness campaigns will be held to inform the public on what the Human Rights Institution is and how it will function.

With respect to the question on Suriname’s plan to **improve management of prisons, increase staffing, and update older prisons to ensure they are safe and not overcrowded**, I may inform as follows.

Two working groups have been established to tackle the issues regarding detention centers. The first working group has the responsibility to specifically assess which issues detention centers frequently deal with and to present practical solutions.

The second working group’s responsibility is the assessment of food and hygiene matters and to report on practical solutions on how to resolve them. The goal of these assessments is to step by step, permanently resolve the issues, including overcrowding and safety.

Several infrastructure projects are being implemented, including the overall renovation of correctional facilities, and the construction of a prison in Moengo and rehabilitation of the prison in Nieuw Amsterdam are planned for 2022.

To continue preventing overcrowding of prisons several policy measures are being put in place, including prevention aimed at reducing recidivism. In this regard, ensuring sufficient resources for the resocialization policy remains important.

Within the framework of integral security, the Penitentiary Officers Corps and the support groups will be adequately trained and equipped and special provisions for the prison facilities, including special security equipment will be put in place.

In addition the Penitentiary Officers Corps will be evaluated with respect to its current structure and functioning.

Furthermore, the Government works towards amending legislation to introduce alternative sentences.

Education, family coaching and mentoring of pupils are considered pillars, aimed at significantly reducing recidivism.

Reorganization of the prison system will take place in cooperation with foreign partners and on the national level the Penitentiary Officers Corps will work with civil society organizations on further resocialization of detainees.

**Madam President,**

**Trafficking in Persons**

There is a “first response trafficking in persons protocol” in place. Officials are trained and refreshment courses are provided on how to identify and handle trafficking in persons victims.

Investigating, prosecuting and convicting traffickers, continues to be a challenge in the interior of Suriname.

Officials who commit or are complicit to sex trafficking can receive a much higher sentence than other traffickers, as stated in our Penal code.

**Domestic and gender-based violence**

The Government has started evaluation and continuation of the project “Gender based violence interventions in response to Covid-19".

This project is conducted by the Ministries of Justice and Police and Home Affairs in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In this context different groups have been trained on how to recognize, handle and prevent domestic and gender-based violence.

The children’s helpline has intensified their awareness campaigns and the public, more specifically children are being urged to report cases of domestic and child abuse.

With respect to access to health care and education in the interior the medical mission was financially supported by the Government for the payment of salaries, operational costs and medical supplies and medicine. This makes health care free for people living in the interior.

For the first time ever, in October of this year, a High School was opened in the interior of Suriname. Another High School is being currently being built in the district of Para. The current government is planning to build more schools at all levels, therefore making education more accessible for people in the interior.

The ultimate goal is that missions consisting of government officials of different departments regularly travel to the interior for assessment and evaluation of issues affecting the interior.

These missions will include officials from the ministries of Justice and Police, Natural Resources, Health, Education and the District Commissioners.

**Madam President,**

Based on the commitment to promote and protect human rights, the Government of Suriname has implemented several policies and actions in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures have been put in place to provide assistance to groups in vulnerable situations, including women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities.

At the same time the pandemic has changed the social fabric of our society, including social norms and attitudes, confronting the State with the risk of a divided society, based on those, who are fully vaccinated and those who are not. This creates new forms of conflict, which require attention and a fitting response.

In this regard, Suriname underscores the importance of, and requests the continued guidance and a clear position of the Human Rights Council on the matter of compulsory vaccination and protection of human rights.

**Madam President,**

Amidst the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, Suriname is also confronted with a challenging fiscal choice between servicing increased sovereign debt and spending more to protect health, education, and livelihoods of its citizens.

In order to get the tremendous foreign debt under control and make the economy healthy again, Suriname developed a comprehensive Crisis and Recovery Plan for the period 2020-2022, which at staff level, has been approved by the IMF.

Suriname has subsequently successfully implemented economic and budgetary reforms ('prior actions').

Obtaining letters of guarantee from important international bilateral partners is now in the final phase.

These financing assurances are necessary for the Executive Board of the IMF to formally approve the programme and release the agreed funds.

Suriname has met all the conditions of the IMF, and the final discussions with the IMF will follow.

With this, there will be a considerable financial support, for the next three years by the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank, which will contribute to ensuring human rights on the ground.

The Crisis and Recovery Plan comprises a coherent set of policy objectives and measures in financial and economic terms, aimed at reversing the ongoing process of impoverishment of large parts of the population towards sustainable real growth and development.

In this regard, the Government of Suriname appeals to the international partners to continue the negotiations, but at the same time emphasizes that with a view to guaranteeing and safeguarding all human rights it is now time for a decision. Suriname therefore look forwards to Board Level approval as soon as possible.

In the meantime, a Multi-Year Development Plan 2022-2027 has also been developed and presented to Parliament last October.

**Madam President,**

The Government will continue the policy of purchasing power increasing measures and provisions. Through this social safety net, especially the elderly, singles, people with disabilities, the unemployed and large families will be supported financially, materially or otherwise.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Housing and the Ministry of Finance and Planning have both entered into a partnership with the Association of Bankers (SBV) and Banking Network Suriname (BNETS).

With this partnership the Government intends to ensure the accessibility of financial services for everyone, especially vulnerable groups. Increasing access to financial services contributes to increasing human dignity by creating financial independence and development.

**In closing**, Madam President,

The Republic of Suriname reiterates its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. In the same spirit, the Government acknowledges the importance of collaboration with the various national stakeholders and international partners.

Suriname recognizes the contribution of special procedures in the promotion and protection of human rights.

In furthering efforts in the area of human rights in Suriname, the Government appreciates the collaboration with relevant special procedures of the Human Rights Council.

In consultation with the Government, UN Rapporteurs also have the opportunity to send out missions to Suriname.

**Finally,** Madam President, my delegation looks forward to a constructive and cooperative interaction and discussion regarding my country’s Universal Periodic Review and remains ready to answer further inquiries of the UPR Working Group.

I thank you kindly for your attention.