



Third Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

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International Decade of People of African Descent Association- Guyana

Panel #3: Culture & Recognition

April 18, 2024

In Guyana, the cultural contributions of African descendants are often overlooked, overshadowed by historical injustices, prejudice, and discrimination. African-derived spiritualities are unfairly demonized, and migrant communities of African descent are sometimes viewed as threats rather than treasures.

Responding to a UN Joint Communication resulting from a 2022 IDPADA-G complaint about the marginalization of African Guyanese, the Government of Guyana set out in clear terms the understanding of African Guyanese history which, from our lived experience appears to shape its policy. In an overview entitled “The Road Guyana has Traversed”, government makes the case that there is no need for special attention to address the African Guyanese condition since they are responsible for any dilemma affecting them by the choices they made to leave low wage plantation work and purchase abandoned plantations and farm for themselves. There is no recognition of the legacies of slavery and colonialism and the deliberate oppression of the African.ⁱ

For example, collectivism and cooperatives, in particular, are central to African Guyanese history and culture as the vehicle for their economic and social activities since Emancipation. However, government is focused on demolishing this African-dominated sector rather than enabling, striking at the very foundation of African Guyanese history, culture and economic development. Co-op lands are being taken away, co-op societies deregistered and co-op property confiscated, witness the attempt to seize lands in Melanie Damishana, East Coast, Demerara in spite of a court order, the confiscation of the co-op building in Anna Regina, Essequibo, and the threat of mass deregistration of co-op societies – most of whose members are African Guyanese.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on this body to urge the government of Guyana to:

1. Establish or revive programs and funding institutions that protect and provide adequate support for the co-operative sector.
2. Commit resources to a mutually agreed plan in pursuit of the goals of the Decade and that of the soon to be declared second Decade along with the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action that seek to protect African heritage, history and culture.
3. Identify, develop and maintain African cultural sites and memorials;
4. Make clear and final the historic distinctions and cultural impact of slavery as endured by Africans and their descendants as opposed to indentureship in the movement for reparations.

In conclusion, cultural recognition is not just a matter of symbolism; it is essential for building inclusive, equitable societies. Let us commit to taking action to ensure that the rich cultural heritage and contributions of people of African descent are celebrated, protected, and acknowledged. Thank you.

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Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana’s “Response to REF: AL GUY 1/2023 Joint Communication of the Special Procedures Sent by the Working Group of Experts on Peoples of African Descent”