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Visit to Suriname

Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent*, **

Summary

The present report contains the findings of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent following its visit to Suriname from 24 March to 2 April 2025. The report provides an overview of the current legal, institutional and policy framework and of measures taken to prevent racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent in Suriname, underscoring positive developments as well as implementation gaps. The Working Group describes the situation, highlights good practices and the main challenges, and makes recommendations.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.

** The summary of the report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, which is annexed to the summary, is being circulated in the language of submission only.

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Annex

Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its visit to Suriname

I. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Government and pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 9/14 and 54/26, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent carried out a country visit to Suriname from 24 March to 2 April 2025. The delegation included Barbara Reynolds (the Chair of the mission), and Miriam Ekiudoko and Isabelle Mamadou (experts).

2. During the visit, the Working Group assessed the human rights situation of people of African descent in Suriname, and gathered information on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Working Group examined laws, policies and strategic plans designed to prevent racial discrimination and safeguard the rights of victims of racism, as well as the State's responses to systemic, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

3. The delegation visited Paramaribo (district and capital), Totness (Coronie district), Moengo and Albina (Marowijne district), Brownsweg (Brokopondo district) and Onverwacht (Para district). It met with the Minister of Justice and the Police, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and senior officials from the Ministries of Justice and the Police, Public Health, Education, Science and Culture, Social Affairs and Housing, Labour, Regional Development, and Natural Resources. Within the Ministry of Justice and the Police, it met with representatives of the Human Rights Bureau and the Bureau for Women and Children. The delegation also met with representatives of the General Bureau of Statistics, the Human Rights Commission of the National Assembly, the Land Rights Bureau in the Office of the President of the Republic, and local authorities. Furthermore, the delegation visited the Central Penitentiary Institution in Santo Boma, the Opa Doeli youth transit detention centre in Paramaribo, a community centre in the Latour neighbourhood of Paramaribo and a school in Peto Ondo village in Moengo.

4. The Working Group thanks the Government of Suriname for accepting the request to visit, and for its fruitful cooperation and efforts to facilitate meetings with different ministerial departments, national institutions and local authorities. The Working Group thanks all the officials at the national and local levels who engaged in dialogue, shared presentations and documents and replied to its questions.

5. The Working Group also thanks the Indigenous Kaliña people at Pierre Kondre village for warmly receiving the delegation and providing testimony of mutual solidarity, both historical and present, and members of the nearby Maroon communities, who shared their struggles for legal recognition of their collective rights as well as their difficulties in accessing social services fully.

6. In each city and district visited, the Working Group met with people of African descent, victims of racial discrimination and their families, human rights defenders, lawyers, academics, Maroon communities and their leaders, and women's groups, including from rural and remote areas, and with civil society organizations led by people of African descent, including Maroons and Creoles in the interior and in urban areas respectively. The Working Group extends its gratitude to the resident coordinator and the United Nations country team for their support, and to the non-governmental organization Na Afrikan Kulturu fu Sranan (Our African Culture of Suriname) for its assistance in organizing and coordinating meetings with civil society.

7. The Working Group notes that Suriname prides itself on being ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse and on the peaceful co-existence and respect among the different communities living on its territory, as symbolized by the nationally celebrated concept of the Flower Garden.

II. Background

A. The presence of people of African descent in Suriname and the institutions of slavery, colonialism and racism

8. The multi-ethnic, multicultural and pluralistic society of Suriname is deeply rooted in the inter-imperial entanglements in the country between European imperial powers. In 1667, through the Treaty of Breda, Suriname was ceded to the Dutch Republic by the British in exchange for New Amsterdam (modern-day New York City).[1]

9. The origins of the African presence in Suriname can be traced back to the mid-seventeenth century expansion of the English sugar frontier. Following the success of sugar cultivation in Barbados, planters sought new frontiers for capital and labour. Between 1650 and 1675, Suriname became a focal point for this diaspora. This expansion redirected Barbadian agricultural expertise and enslaved labour to the South American mainland.[2]

10. Enslaved Africans were first brought to Suriname in 1651[3] by British planters under the patronage of Francis Willoughby,[4] at which time the first permanent settlement of Europeans was established.[5]

11. The transition to Dutch control in 1667 did not alleviate the conditions of the enslaved; rather, it intensified the plantation system. The plantation economy that emerged was predicated on the brutal exploitation of enslaved Africans, who were imported in massive numbers to clear forests and cultivate sugar. By the eighteenth century, Suriname had become one of the most profitable sugar colonies in the world, yet also the most lethal. The demographic imbalance, with enslaved Africans vastly outnumbering Europeans, created a volatile environment that facilitated the most significant phenomenon in Surinamese history: the Maroon resistance.[6]

12. On 1 July 1863, slavery was formally abolished in Suriname but ended in practice in 1873 for those who were already enslaved, after a mandatory 10-year transition period.

13. The General Bureau of Statistics of Suriname reports that Maroons (21.7%) and Creoles (15.7%) combined account for roughly 37.4% of the country's population.[7]

B. The Maroons and the formation of tribal communities

14. Maroons (or Businengre) are the descendants of enslaved Africans who escaped from plantations into the dense rainforest of the interior. Over centuries, these escapees formed distinct tribal societies, successfully defending their autonomy through guerrilla warfare against colonial forces. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Dutch colonial government was forced to sign peace treaties with the major Maroon tribes, including the N'djuka (in 1760),

[1] See https://opil.ouplaw.com/page/492.

[2] Justin Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam: the Barbadian diaspora and the expansion of the English sugar frontier, 1650–75", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 73, No. 2 (April 2016), pp. 225 and 256, available from https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.73.2.0225.

[3] Franklin Jabini, "The beginning of the Church of England in Suriname", *Academic Journal of Suriname*, vol. 2, No. 1 (December 2011), pp. 210–220.

[4] Justin Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam: the Barbadian diaspora and the expansion of the English sugar frontier, 1650–75".

[5] This short-lived, early English colony is also known as Willoughbyland, named after the Governor of Barbados, Lord Francis Willoughby, who sent an expedition led by Anthony Rowse to settle the region in 1650 and 1651. See Franklin Jabini, "The beginning of the Church of England in Suriname".

[6] Richard Price, *Rainforest Warriors: Human Rights on Trial*, University of Pennsylvania Press (January 2012).

[7] See https://statistics-suriname.org/.

the Saramaka (in 1762) and the Matawai (in 1769).[8] These treaties granted the Maroons a degree of territorial autonomy and the right to self-governance under their own traditional authorities, such as the Granman.

15. Today, there are six primary Maroon tribes: the Saramaka, the N'djuka, the Matawai, the Paramaka, the Aluku and the Kwinti. These groups are recognized internationally as "tribal peoples" because they share similar social, cultural and economic conditions with Indigenous Peoples, having established a deep, ancestral connection to their lands.[9]

C. The Creoles

16. Distinct from the Maroons are the "Creoles", a term used in Suriname to describe the urban and coastal Afro-Surinamese population that remained within the colonial social structure and largely integrated into the urban and coastal society after emancipation in 1863. While Maroons maintained a tribal lifestyle, Creoles became central to the political and administrative development of the Surinamese State. Nonetheless, economic difficulties for Creoles are often rooted in systemic barriers to credit, housing and employment, alongside a historical loss of land titles in the Frimangron ("Free Man's Land") neighbourhood of Paramaribo during the post-colonial transition.

D. Uprooted communities: the Afobaka Dam and the impact of extractive industries

17. Displacement of Afro-Surinamese communities has been a recurring theme in the pursuit of national development. The most egregious historical example is the construction in the 1960s of the Afobaka Dam, resulting in the creation of the Brokopondo Reservoir. This hydroelectric project, intended to power aluminium-smelting operations, flooded approximately 1,500 square kilometres of Saramaka ancestral territory. More than 6,000 Saramaka were forcibly displaced into "transmigration villages", without receiving adequate compensation or legal title to their new lands.[10] The ecological and social impact was devastating; the reservoir submerged dozens of villages, sacred sites and traditional hunting grounds. Expert witness accounts described the project as having been conducted without any meaningful environmental or social impact assessment, leading to long-term mercury contamination and loss of food sovereignty.[11] Although the Afobaka Dam project originated in the 1960s, its reported social, environmental and land-related consequences constitute an inherited legacy that continues to affect displaced communities and to influence contemporary perceptions of mistrust of State-led economic projects.[12]

E. Land and resource rights, and environmental issues

18. The Working Group acknowledges the stated intention of Suriname to resolve land rights issues. It is, however, highly concerned that despite binding judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the State has failed to adopt appropriate measures to find a definitive solution to the problem of land rights for Surinamese of African descent.

19. Among critical issues are the absence of legislation recognizing collective rights of Surinamese of African descent over lands and resources; land dispossession, which particularly affects people of African descent; land tenure, land ownership and use;

[8] Amazon Conservation Team, "Support for the sustainable development of the interior: collective rights: land rights, tenure, and use of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons in Suriname", final report (ACT-Suriname, Paramaribo, December 2010).

[9] Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of the Saramaka People v. Suriname*, Judgment, 28 November 2007.

[10] Affidavit of Dr. Robert Goodland: expert witness in the *Case of Twelve Saramaka Clans v. Suriname*, Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

[11] Ibid., p. 5.

[12] Ellen-Rose Kambel and Fergus MacKay, *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Maroons in Suriname* (Copenhagen, International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1999).

exceptionally long waiting periods to purchase land; the granting of concessions on traditional and ancestral lands; and planned and current regulations which heavily favour land encroachment. Concerns remain regarding the imminent adoption of the Civil Code, which may have a negative impact on the rights of people of African descent, as well as ongoing legislative debates over collective rights.

20. Article 41 of the Constitution stipulates that "natural riches and resources are property of the nation and shall be used to promote economic, social and cultural development. The nation has the inalienable right to take complete possession of its natural resources in order to utilize them to the benefit of the economic, social and cultural development of Suriname." In practice, this has been understood by the State as meaning that all land and natural resources without proven private title belong to the State and must be used to promote economic development.[13] Information gathered indicates that the State has used this "domain principle" to justify granting concessions to extractive industries on lands traditionally occupied by Afrodescendent tribal communities, without their consent. This has resulted in disputes with people of African descent, and contradicts international and regional human rights standards.[14]

21. The intersection of land rights, environmental degradation and economic conflict in Suriname has distinct impacts on Maroons and Creoles because they maintain a spiritual and cultural connection to the rainforests. The State continues to grant mining and logging concessions on the Maroon traditional territories without formal delimitation or demarcation.[15]

22. Gold mining, both small-scale and industrial, often occurs on Maroon lands. These activities lead to deforestation, river siltation, and displacement of traditional livelihoods, allegedly often with the tacit approval of the State rooted in the "domain principle".[16] Consequently, the State's reliance on gold mining and timber exports creates a structural incentive to deny communal land rights, which leads to ongoing environmental degradation and mercury poisoning in Maroon territories, constituting a failure to guarantee the right to a clean and healthy environment.

23. The Working Group commends the accession by Suriname to the Minamata Convention on Mercury, in 2018, and the subsequent development of the national action plan on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, in conformity with article 7 of the above-mentioned Convention. However, it is concerned that the most pressing environmental crisis in Suriname is the prevalence of artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining utilizes mercury to amalgamate gold, leading to the release of approximately 10,000kg of mercury into the Surinamese environment annually. This mercury enters the aquatic food chain as methylmercury, bioaccumulating in predatory fish, which are a primary protein source for Maroon communities.

F. Landmark jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

24. Given that Suriname lacks domestic legal recognition for collective land rights, Surinamese Afrodescendent communities have turned to the Inter-American human rights mechanisms to seek protection on several occasions. The following cases are the most significant.

[13] Ibid.

[14] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 1, stipulates: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

[15] World Bank, "Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Planning Framework (ITPPF): Suriname Competitiveness and Sector Diversification Project" (Washington, D.C., 2019).

[16] Resolve, "Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) within a human rights framework: lessons from a Suriname case study", Merian Expert Advisory Panel, 2016.

***Aloeboetoe et al. v. Suriname* (1993)**

25. The first significant case involving Suriname at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights was *Aloeboetoe et al. v. Suriname*. In December 1987, during the Surinamese War of the Interior, members of the National Army detained and murdered seven Saramaka Maroons near the village of Atjoni.[17] The State accepted responsibility for the killings. The judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on reparations in this case required the State to provide compensation based on Saramaka kinship structures and customary law, which was considered as a precedent for the recognition of "tribal identity" in international law.[18]

The Moiwana Massacre, of 1986, and *Moiwana Community v. Suriname* (2005)

26. On 29 November 1986, the Suriname National Army attacked the N'djuka Maroon village of Moiwana, massacring approximately 40 residents – mostly women, children and elderly people – burning the village to the ground.[19] Survivors fled into the forest and eventually to French Guiana, becoming refugees. For nearly two decades, the State failed to conduct a criminal investigation or to allow the survivors to return to their lands.

27. In the case of *Moiwana Community v. Suriname*, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the State had violated the survivors' rights to judicial protection and freedom of movement. The Court recognized the "all-encompassing relationship" between the N'djuka Maroon people and their traditional lands, noting that the inability to perform burial rituals for their murdered kin on their ancestral soil caused profound spiritual and psychological suffering.[20] The Court ordered the State to investigate the massacre, to provide reparations and to legally title the collective land ownership.

***Saramaka People v. Suriname* (2007)**

28. The ruling in *Saramaka People v. Suriname* holds substantive influence for the rights of people of African descent. The Saramaka challenged the State's granting of logging and mining concessions on their territory without consultation or compensation. The Court considered that "the Saramaka people make up a tribal community whose social, cultural and economic characteristics are different from other sections of the national community, particularly because of their special relationship with their ancestral territories, and because they regulate themselves, at least partially, by their own norms, customs and/or traditions",[21] and recognized that they had distinct rights to the natural resources found within their traditional territories, which could be restricted only under specific circumstances, and that such restriction applied also in cases involving the granting of mining and logging concessions.

29. The Court established three safeguards against restrictions, that would endanger the survival of the Saramaka people, on these property rights, for any State-led development, investment, extraction or exploration on their tribal lands to follow:

(a) The State must ensure the effective participation of the members of the Saramaka people, in conformity with their customs and traditions, regarding any development, investment, exploration or extraction plan within Saramaka territory;

(b) The State must ensure that the community receives a reasonable benefit from the project;

[17] Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of Aloeboetoe et al. v. Suriname*, Reparations and Costs, Judgment, 10 September 1993.

[18] Aalt Meijknecht, Brigit Rombouts and Jessica Asarfi, *The Implementation of IACtHR Judgments Concerning Land Rights in Suriname* (International Law Association, 2016).

[19] Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of the Moiwana Community v. Suriname*, Judgment, 15 June 2005.

[20] Ibid., para. 103.

[21] Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of the Saramaka People v. Suriname*, Judgment, 28 November 2007, para. 84.

(c) No concession should be granted unless or until an independent environmental and social impact assessment is conducted by technically capable entities.[22]

G. Judicial non-compliance and denial of collective legal personality

30. Despite these judgments from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Suriname has exhibited a persistent pattern of judicial non-compliance. At the time of the Working Group's visit, the State had yet to enact a comprehensive legislative framework that recognizes the collective legal personality of Maroon and Indigenous communities. The implementation of these judgments is still debated in Suriname. The State indicates obstacles in operationalizing them while acknowledging that the process to give effect to the judgments is still "under study", with consideration of different implementation options and in consultation with the populations concerned. The Working Group is of the view that without this recognition, tribal communities cannot hold legal title to land as a group, making them vulnerable to "land-grabbing" by private interests and the State.

III. Legal, policy and institutional framework and steps taken for the protection of the human rights of people of African descent

A. Legal framework

31. Suriname is a Party to most of the core international human rights treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. However, the State is not a Party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Nor has it accepted the individual complaints procedures under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communication procedure or the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Working Group regrets that Suriname has not ratified the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). The Working Group invites Suriname to accept the human rights treaties mentioned above to which it is not yet a Party.

32. Article 8 of the country's Constitution establishes the principle of equality and non-discrimination, stating that "no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of birth, sex, race, language, religion, origin, education, physical or mental condition, or any other status".[23] Articles 8 to 39 (chaps. 5 and 6) of the Constitution guarantee civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms. Noteworthily, article 28 stipulates equal rights for all employees irrespective of age, sex, race, nationality, religion or political opinions. This constitutional anti-discrimination framework is complemented by laws that have been enacted to give effect to the promotion of the principle of non-discrimination and equality for citizens and foreign nationals, such as articles 126 sub (a), 175, 175 sub (a), 176, 176 sub (b), 176 sub (c) and 500 sub (a) of the Penal Code. Notably, the definition of discrimination in article 126 sub (a) of the Penal Code applies to everyone, taking the principle of equality into consideration, while its article 175 sub (a) prohibits organizations from promoting and inciting racial discrimination and criminalizes incitement to hate, discrimination or violence. Article 500 sub (a) of the Penal Code criminalizes occupational

[22] Ibid., para. 129.

[23] Constitution of Suriname (1987).

discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation. The framework also includes the Equal Treatment in Employment Act. However, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has recommended that Suriname align the definition of racial discrimination included in articles 126 sub (a) and 175 sub (a) of the Penal Code fully with article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and explicitly prohibit direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres.

33. Additionally, to guarantee the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples, Suriname has commenced the process of formal legal recognition of their collective rights. The Bill on the Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Communities was submitted to the parliament for the first time in 2019. After review by a presidential commission established by the current Government, an amended bill was pending for public debate in the parliament at the time of the Working Group's visit. In this regard, the Working Group notes, with great concern, the withdrawal of the Bill on the Collective Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, as the absence of such a framework does not help to clarify the legal situation with regard to people of African descent enjoying several rights collectively.

B. Institutional and policy measures

34. The Working Group welcomes the establishment by the National Assembly (the unicameral parliament) of Suriname of a Human Rights Commission, which consists of seven parliamentarians from the whole spectrum of political representation. The Commission is tasked with studying bills and reporting its findings to the National Assembly. Its main functions consist of mainstreaming human rights into the work of the parliament, and scrutiny of all bills and of the executive's policies to ensure their compliance with the country's human rights obligations. It can initiate and carry out inquiries, ascertain and review the executive's reasons for not acceding to or ratifying existing international human rights treaties and scrutinize the executive's response to judgments of national, regional and international courts with implications for human rights. The Commission has the power to propose amendments to legislation, to hold hearings and consultations, to conduct visits within the country, [24] to receive complaints emanating from groups and to issue recommendations to the Plenary of the National Assembly and to the Government. The Commission had reportedly heard and consulted with the Maroon populations/people of African descent with regard to land rights issues. The Working Group appreciates this avenue as an additional forum available to people of African descent to raise their concerns.

35. The Working Group notes that, following several recommendations from human rights bodies, Suriname is currently working to establish a national human rights institution, with a draft law at its final stage, which had been submitted to the Ministry of Justice and the Police in January 2025 for further transmission to the National Assembly. The Working Groups believes that establishing an independent national human rights institution with a mandate on racial discrimination issues will provide additional remedies to people of African descent where their rights are violated.

36. The Working Group notes that Suriname established a National Committee for the Commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery, on 19 March 2022, with the aim of organizing national commemoration activities from June 2022 to August 2023, including the preparation of a study on the transatlantic slave trade, trade and slavery, and the contemporary legacies, and their impact on Suriname. It also notes that the Committee developed a 12-point national reparation programme as a framework for such activities. The Working Group sought information regarding the current status and activities of the Committee. However, it remains unclear to the Working Group whether the Committee is currently operational and, if so, what impact its work has had.

[24] See https://data.ipu.org/parliament/SR/specialized-bodies/?chamber=SR-LC01&theme=human_rights.

37. The Working Group was informed by some interlocutors that civil society organizations that support Surinamese of African descent face challenges in accessing support from the Government. Concerns were expressed regarding transparency of the allocation of this support to civil society organizations.

IV. Manifestations of racial discrimination

A. Entrenched impact of the legacies of enslavement and colonialism

38. People of African descent endured centuries of slavery followed by a period of colonialism. One hundred and sixty-three years after the abolition of slavery and 51 years after the country's independence, Surinamese of African descent, the largest racial group in the country, are still subjected to the legacy of enslavement and colonialism, and suffer subtle and passive forms of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion, which manifest themselves in many ways.

39. Some testimonies explained that this unfavourable situation of people of African descent is partly due to negative perceptions from others, expressed through formulas such as "these people do not invest in themselves, they do not save, they do not work hard, they lack self-esteem and self-confidence". Other Surinamese of African descent admitted that they were "living in mental slavery", thus conveying that the legacy of enslavement was still vivid among many of them. These statements do not indict Surinamese of African descent only, but all Surinamese. Most interlocutors across racial groups acknowledged that Surinamese of African descent were not enjoying their human rights on an equal footing with other racial groups. This leads the Working Group to conclude that one of the most egregious harms to these communities, as Maroons, Creoles, plantation groups and other tribal communities, has been the negative impact on their identity formation, especially of children and adolescents. The vibrancy, courage and tenacity of their forebears of just a century ago has been suppressed, and the need to survive has reportedly led to a certain passivity and internalization of slurs and stereotypes.

40. Another pervasive form of discrimination manifests in the Government's unequal distribution of support. Communities in districts visited in the interior reported receiving significantly less support than other districts inhabited by other ethnic and/or racial groups. Accordingly, the very limited State assistance and investment suggest that the disadvantaged situation of people of African descent is not merely a consequence of living in remote areas but originates also from the adoption and existence of laws, public policies and practices that have a discriminatory impact on them. The long-standing default by the Government on giving effect to the judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which are favourable to the rights of Surinamese of African descent in Suriname, has fostered and conveyed a sentiment among Surinamese of African descent that their rights are not treated as being equal to those of the rest of the population.

41. In pursuance of its desire to preserve unity, harmony and concordance among the diverse racial groups living in its territory, Suriname has an opportunity to make a decisive break from the legacies of enslavement and the past. These pervasive legacies inhibit people of African descent, especially Maroon communities, from enjoying their rights fully on an equal footing with others, leading to structural racial discrimination and underlying forms of racism. Suriname has an occasion to examine the current situation of this population in a frank, transparent and inclusive manner to build a society free from any kind of discrimination and exclusion.

B. Lack of recognition of the contributions of people of African descent to Surinamese society

42. While acknowledging the information provided by the State, according to testimonies and experiences shared, people of African descent suffer from a lack of recognition at multiple levels. This encompasses the very limited presence of positive narratives on their

contributions to Surinamese society – the State indicated that there was no funding for any project on promoting the history of the contributions of people of African descent in Suriname, as well as the insufficient funding for development projects in remote and rural areas inhabited mostly by Maroon communities.

43. Structural racial discrimination has led many people of African descent to feel and express that they do not fully belong to Surinamese society. Although different groups of people of African descent collectively represent the majority of the population according to the 2012 census, they continue to be left behind according to most socioeconomic indicators. Their voices are reportedly marginalized compared to the rest of the population. “Our voices do not count”, stated a woman during a meeting with Afrodescendent communities. This concern of being ignored by authorities was repeatedly brought to the attention of the Working Group during visits in Maroon-majority districts, coupled with complaints that despite the deterioration of their living conditions in several areas, most of their grievances have been overlooked and have remained unaddressed.

44. The impact of the prevailing civil, political, economic and social conditions facing Surinamese of African descent poses a threat to their viability as a group. In the first instance is the explicit failure to recognize Afro-Surinamese as a unified demographic – which appears as a direct legacy of the divide-and-conquer strategies used throughout centuries of slavery, colonization and segregation. Secondly, in Suriname, the colour of one’s skin continues to cause division, perpetuated by the preference for some racial groups over others. This division continues to fuel the racial slurs that many have indicated they have experienced, particularly at school. Afro-Surinamese youth and young professionals shared their experiences of having their ambitions to further their education or to enter certain professions questioned, and their way of life disdained. Thirdly, the Working Group heard testimonies from some people of African descent that misperceptions and stereotyping of Surinamese of African descent reverberates, to some extent, in the education and economic sectors of Suriname, which contributes to feeding injustices.

C. Unequal development across regions

45. While noting information from State representatives about initiatives taken to promote development in districts of the interior – inhabited mostly by Maroon communities – and about challenges in this regard, including lack of funding, the Working Group observed noticeable disparities in development between districts of the interior and the capital, as well as between certain districts. These disparities, in regard to which the State acknowledged a need for improvement, are characterized by unstable electricity, poor road conditions and inadequate or underdeveloped health, education and water infrastructure. The expression “going to town” repeatedly used by some communities and local authorities symbolizes the challenges that they face and the inevitability, in some situations, of travelling to Paramaribo, the capital, to access appropriate services.

46. To foster development in the hinterland and across districts, the State has adopted a decentralization policy, which is aimed at granting them greater autonomy. However, this policy has not proved fully functional, partly due to a lack of funding for implementation. In Moengo, the Working Group was informed that despite the development or design of district-level strategies and plans, lack of funding prevented their realization, prompting an interlocutor to describe this decentralization process as entirely “passive”.

47. This “passive decentralization process” and the reportedly limited State investment is also noticeable in the capital’s peri-urban areas, particularly where large numbers of people of African descent live. Across all of these areas, the Working Group observed substandard physical infrastructure – specifically with regard to roads, waste management and electricity – along with a lack of adequate education and health facilities and services, and of properly trained professionals. The impacts of inadequate and insufficient employment opportunities and severe difficulties in securing decent housing are reportedly particularly evident in these peri-urban areas and settlements, as are the overcrowding, poor sanitation and environmental degradation, coupled with the inability of occupants or their landlords to maintain the properties.

48. This differentiated support affects agriculture and farmers in the hinterland. While Surinamese of African descent in the hinterland maintain a deep-rooted farming tradition of cultivating rice, alongside other crops, the Working Group was advised that they had been routinely excluded from State subsidies and flood relief distributions. Furthermore, these communities receive significantly less agricultural extension support than other farming groups, which depresses their incomes and limits their ability to invest or reinvest in improved seeds and equipment for their farms.

D. Civil and political rights

49. The concerns outlined below are a summary of testimonies and reports received during the visit.

Lack of comprehensive disaggregated data

50. The Working Group welcomes, as a good practice, the collection of data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and national origin on the prison population at Santa Boma prison. Nevertheless, the Working Group expresses regret that it did not receive from State representatives any other reliable, comprehensive data disaggregated by race, colour, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex and other status and socioeconomic indicators in all areas of life regarding people of African descent and other groups in Suriname, while noting the State's position on the collection of data on race and ethnicity in several areas, such as the public service. It regrets that, even where disaggregated data are collected and maintained by public authorities, access to such data may be constrained by the requirement to submit a special request. The Working Group considers that, subject to applicable safeguards for privacy and the protection of personal data, aggregated and disaggregated official statistics should be proactively published, regularly updated and made readily accessible in the public domain. The Working Group recognizes that the production of comprehensive disaggregated statistics requires a coordinated national statistical system. While the General Bureau of Statistics has a central role in producing independent official statistics, relevant administrative data are maintained by ministries and institutions responsible for areas including health, education, law enforcement and justice. Collecting data would nevertheless enable Suriname to design targeted measures – including special measures – and other policies aimed at promoting and facilitating the advancement of people of African descent, fighting against the discrimination they endure and monitoring the effectiveness of these measures. It would have allowed the Working Group to properly assess the extent to which people of African descent confront specific challenges compared to others.

Stereotypes, negative perceptions, and degrading expressions and hate speech, including through media, especially social media

51. Discussions and testimonies shared with the Working Group reveal that stereotypes regarding people of African descent remain prevalent in Surinamese society, often manifested through derogatory expressions and disdainful attitudes. This encompasses treating and/or stereotyping people of African descent as being lazy, lacking in self-confidence, prone to criminal behaviour and unworthy of high-ranking positions. A conversation at a community centre illustrated this issue. An adolescent girl said: "Yes, we have self-esteem, but other people bring us down. Other people think that people of African descent are still slaves and must do what others ask them to do." A young volunteer at the centre agreed, noting that "people think that people of African descent are not educated and have bad luck". Another testimony concluded, similarly, that "when a crime is committed, people automatically assume it was committed by a person of African descent".

52. While the Constitution of Suriname prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity and religion, the State lacks specific and comprehensive legislation that criminalizes racist hate speech. Negative and degrading expressions are reportedly widespread on social media, primarily directed at men of African descent. Despite the existence of a special unit to monitor it, online racist hate speech has spread out increasingly, with no other solution to counter it effectively. Reporting by victims of cases of racist hate speech remains insufficient.

Data are not available. Given that current tracking systems cannot trace anonymous accounts, efficient detection and follow-up measures remain limited.

53. Although Suriname has established a special unit to monitor and combat expressions of hate on social media, it remains understaffed. The Working Group is concerned that the police, prosecutors and judges do not receive regular training on methods to properly identify, register and prosecute online racist hate speech. The inefficacy of State measures intended to combat enduring stereotypes rooted in slavery has the effect of enabling the propagation of such stereotypes to be perpetuated on social media while denigrating a significant portion of the population. The Working Group emphasized that this situation is disparaging to a specific group and undermines the development of a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Deprivation of liberty, administration of justice, and law enforcement

54. The Working Group heard concerns regarding discrimination within the administration of the criminal justice system, including juvenile justice and law enforcement. This includes a disproportionate representation of Afro-Surinamese males in the overall prison and detention population in Suriname, including youths, as exemplified by the Opa Doeli youth transit detention centre in Paramaribo. Men and boys of Afro-Surinamese descent receive disproportionately more severe penalties than others.

55. In Santa Boma prison, one of the country's main prisons and populated mostly with people of African descent, the Working Group found conditions comparable to detention centres that it had visited in other countries. Nevertheless, three major concerns emerged and deserve consideration. The first concerns the lack of nutritional value and the monotony of the meals. The second regards the lack of structured opportunities for the education and skills training of inmates to ensure their successful reintegration into society. The third issue concerns healthcare in the facility, specifically with regard to mental health, the overuse of paracetamol for any ailment, the administration of medication by non-medical personnel and lack of access to specialized preventive healthcare.

56. At Santa Boma prison, authorities have reported the presence of foreign Afro-descendant detainees, primarily from Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Haiti and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). However, the State does not ensure some legal safeguards, in particular interpretation and translation services for those who do not speak the official language, to receive clear information about their rights and detention conditions. Sometimes, other detainees assist these foreigners in understanding their rights and obligations, as well as with legal and administrative procedures.

57. The Working Group emphasizes that these failures, besides potentially constituting discrimination, are in contradiction of international standards protecting the rights of detainees irrespective of their migration status, and place foreign detainees of African descent in a position of vulnerability to discrimination and abuse. The lack of accessibility of information in languages they understand has, in several cases, resulted in prolonged detention of foreign detainees of African descent without them understanding the reasons for their detention or the processes affecting them, thereby worsening their legal insecurity. The authorities informed the Working Group that every detainee had the right to a State-appointed legal adviser and legal assistance. The Working Group was not, however, able to assess the accessibility of legal advisers and legal assistance and thus the effective enjoyment of this right by foreign detainees, particularly those requiring interpretation or translation.

58. The reported disproportionate underrepresentation of Surinamese of African descent within the police and the judicial apparatus, including in the offices of the courts, is a concern to the Working Group. It is unclear about the deeper reasons for such underrepresentation – whether it is due to a lack of qualified candidates, a lack of awareness-raising initiatives directed at Afrodescendent communities about recruitments, or discriminatory practices. Concerns were brought to the Working Group's attention about police misconduct during interactions with Afro-Surinamese people, as well as about reprisals faced by Afro-Surinamese advocates and activists in recent years. Such encounters may result in mistrust on the part of these communities of the police and judicial authorities. The State must investigate these reported encounters, including with regard to potential violations of the right to freedom of expression. Ensuring adequate representation of people of African

descent would foster a more culturally sensitive approach to the administration of justice and law enforcement, potentially helping to reduce discrimination and stereotyping in the criminal justice system.

Political and public participation, representation, and governance

59. Despite people of African descent in Suriname collectively constituting the largest demographic in Suriname, the absence of disaggregated data has prevented the Working Group from verifying the proportion of their representation in political and public affairs, including in the parliament, elective bodies at all levels, and high-level administrative and executive positions, as well as the inclusion of women of African descent in these positions. Nevertheless, information gathered suggests that people of African descent remain underrepresented in public and political affairs in Suriname due to structural discrimination, notwithstanding the State's promotion of the "One Nation" policy.

60. Despite the information provided on efforts undertaken by the State, the limited participation of people of African descent, particularly those living in the interior, is evident as regards consultation about laws and projects that may affect them. Testimonies corroborate the lack of adequate and meaningful consultation of people of African descent in the elaboration of legislation, especially concerning land rights, land leases, and mining concessions granted on their ancestral lands. The principle of free, prior and informed consent has not always been adequately and meaningfully implemented. This has affected various communities in the hinterland, as exemplified in Brokopondo district. Although the Government provided information about engaging with communities on land rights consultations, several residents in Brokopondo and further testimonies denied that they had been consulted about the development of mining activities within their territories and reported that the principle of free, prior and informed consent was largely disregarded. The State has not always ensured that in all instances, the positions, perspectives and proposals of Maroon communities are adequately reflected in the drafting of laws and policies related to their collective territorial rights. Their continued exclusion from the decision-making processes regarding their rights and well-being remains a pressing concern.

61. Also, the Working Group is of the view that the absence of participation of people of African descent in decisions affecting them creates tensions in the country, violates their right to participate in public affairs and fosters mistrust toward the Government. It emphasizes that consultations must be meaningful; therefore, Suriname should take all appropriate measures to ascertain the legitimacy of community representatives and consult with them in all situations where people of African descent may be impacted.

62. The Working Group learned that protests regarding land rights and the proposed bill on collective rights had led to severe tensions between the State and Afrodescendent communities, creating major obstacles to dialogue and collaboration. Police forces had allegedly been deployed to disperse demonstrators, with protesters facing terror, reprisals and incarceration. Additionally, while some spaces for dialogue with the State exist, in practice the Government reportedly limits recognition to large non-governmental organizations and government-affiliated foundations as legitimate interlocutors. Meanwhile, organizations addressing land rights issues and collective legal recognition of Afrodescendent communities are marginalized, often ignored by the Government and politically stigmatized.

Representation in media

63. The underrepresentation and negative portrayal of people of African descent in media are of concern to the Working Group. Shared testimonies as well as information before the Working Group state that media ownership is concentrated within groups other than people of African descent, which significantly influences the narratives and perspectives that dominate public broadcasting. Several media programmes are produced in the languages of these groups, which limits accessibility by Afrodescendent communities and impedes the representation of their voices and concerns in media. The language barrier, coupled with very limited diversity among media professionals, perpetuates negative stereotypes about Afrodescendants, and risks perpetuating their marginalization in public discourse.

Freedom of religion

64. The Working Group welcomes the establishment of the Interreligious Council of Suriname, in 2000, which promotes interreligious harmony among the various religious groups in Suriname. It notes that since 2006, Suriname has formally incorporated African-based religions into the broader national religious framework, aiming to preserve and honour the country's rich cultural and religious diversity. However, some African-based religious traditions and expressions, especially Winti and Rastafari, reportedly remain marginalized and significantly stigmatized. Examples include the stigmatization of some students wearing their hair in locks – a core tenet of the Rastafari religion – being denied access to Christian schools. The Ministry of Education has yet to remedy the situation, despite complaints raised by several organizations. The Working Group regrets that while the Council includes representatives from Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish groups, representatives from African-based religions have not yet been admitted.

E. Structural racial discrimination and economic, social and cultural rights

Health

65. The Working Group found that while certain hinterland districts primarily populated by people of African descent possessed outpatient clinics, they nevertheless lacked hospitals and pharmacies of good standing and a sufficient number of physicians, specialists and ambulance services. Therefore, people of African descent are compelled to travel long distances to the capital or better-equipped districts to receive adequate care, in particular for more complex health issues, especially chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes but also certain childbearing complications. This situation prompted a resident of Totness to request that a hospital be built in the local area to avoid having to go "to town" (to the capital) to access medical care. While individuals with a low income possess State-issued health cards allowing for free medical care, this system only covers certain treatments. In the absence of data available to the Working Group, testimonies suggest that the prevalence of chronic diseases is significant. The Working Group also learned that the number of patients with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections was increasing, with many persons of African descent remaining unaware of their medical condition.

66. In another vein, many people of African descent in the districts visited suffer from mental health issues, yet adequate care is either unavailable or unaffordable. In particular, those dealing with post-traumatic slave syndrome and chronic racial stress require immediate, appropriate attention and targeted intervention.

Education

67. In districts visited, the Working Group learned that access to secondary schools, high schools and vocational education remains challenging for many children of African descent. Sometimes, they have no choice but to pursue their education outside their home districts, including in the capital. The districts of Brokopondo, Coronie, Marowijne, and particularly the towns and villages of Para, Totness and Moengo, are emblematic of this situation. The shortage of specialized educators, a scarcity of qualified teachers in certain fields that facilitate admission to higher education or university and poor educational tools for many children of African descent hinder access to education. Information received highlights poor educational conditions, such as substandard school buildings and facilities and inadequate sanitation, and a very limited number of playgrounds and sport facilities for children in several schools.

68. In Albina, testimonies indicate that approximately 50% of children continue their education in neighbouring French Guiana due to its proximity and better quality of schooling. This "educational migration" is driven by the above-mentioned factors. Additionally, some children of African descent who moved to pursue schooling in the capital had to repeat lower grades due to prior insufficient preparation.

69. The fact that Dutch is the sole language of instruction poses a significant barrier for children whose mother tongue is Sranan Tongo or another tribal language. The Working Group expresses concern regarding the unavailability of curricula in the Sranan Tongo language. Furthermore, the lack of curricula on Afrodescendent people's history and contributions to the nation's development risks perpetuating stereotypes and derogatory treatment or expressions against them. The Working Group was informed that the fact that the history of slavery had been addressed in schoolbooks mainly from the economic angle and from a Eurocentric perspective had overshadowed the harms of the transatlantic slave trade, the sufferings of the enslaved and the legacies of this past. In addition, the Working Group learned that some foundations and associations were "handling" the history of people of African descent in schools. The Working Group is of the view that the teaching of the history of people of African descent is primarily a duty of the State and should be done through school curricula.

Housing

70. Surinamese of African descent frequently encounter significant obstacles in obtaining adequate and affordable housing. Many are compelled to live in cramped, crowded spaces, such as two-bedroomed homes that accommodate more than eight persons. Homes, and sometimes even offices, lack adequate running water, sanitation and waste removal and stable electricity. For example, the Working Group was informed that in Brokopondo district, running water had not been supplied to homes and offices for more than two months. Although State-led social housing programmes exist, they remain largely theoretical, as the eligibility criteria often exclude individuals in dire financial situations, thereby restricting access to them for low-income Afro-Surinamese. In some instances, housing programmes have been completely discontinued, such as in Brownsweg, and many residents have been left with no options for accessing more affordable and adequate housing. Although State interlocutors reported the possibility of applying for a housing subsidy, testimonies collected in the interior indicated that some obstacles prevented low-income Afro-Surinamese from fulfilling the criteria.

Employment and economic empowerment, and lack of economic opportunities

71. The limited economic opportunities for Surinamese of African descent can be traced back to constraints imposed on them following the abolition of slavery persisting through colonialism and post-independence.

72. Despite measures taken by the State, including services available for jobseekers as well as the existence of the Equal Treatment in Employment Act (which is not well known or publicized), which allows for complaints in cases of discrimination in employment, the reduced employment opportunities and limited economic empowerment for people of African descent needs immediate attention. Regrettably, the lack of data makes it impossible to measure its magnitude. Nevertheless, according to testimonies, Black entrepreneurs are largely confined to small-scale enterprises, due to various obstacles in securing business loans – coupled with a prolonged application process that they consider to be singularly humiliating and exhausting. In certain geographical areas, securing a credit or insurance is reportedly virtually impossible, depressing local investment. The "civil war", which took place several years ago, has been pointed to as one of the causes of the underinvestment, as it left a stigma that has had negative effects regarding potential investment in the areas concerned in the interior, either by the State or the private sector.

73. The Working Group learned, across the districts it visited, for example in Totness (Corinie District), that people of African descent faced harsher difficulties in starting a business, and about the limited work opportunities, due to the lack of funding and necessary equipment, including for the development of agriculture and employment opportunities. In that context, many women of African descent in the interior expressed a strong desire to start or develop small businesses as income-generating activities but were constrained by difficulties in securing funding and government support.

74. Industries and projects (e.g. gas and oil) developed in the territories where people of African descent mostly live in the hinterland do not benefit them as regards employment opportunities as they are mainly unskilled. Even when they graduate, job opportunities for

them remain very limited and some are compelled to leave the country in search of better opportunities abroad. Consequently, most Afro-Surinamese in these regions rely on administrative or government jobs, as employment opportunities in other sectors remain scarce.

Cultural rights: promotion and preservation of cultures and traditions

75. Under international human rights standards, Suriname has the obligation to promote and protect the cultural rights of all groups living in its territory. However, Maroon communities reported challenges in preserving their cultural heritage and traditions. Restricted resources for cultural education, the limited number of venues for gatherings or ceremonies and the impact of modernization threaten their traditional practices. The Working Group learned from some communities in the interior that their cultural projects are rarely approved and not funded, and that others "steal" them. Without adequate support, oral histories, music, crafts and dances risk dilution and loss over time.

76. Communities of African descent frequently face obstacles in accessing sports and recreational facilities. Inadequate infrastructure – such as sports fields, gyms and training centres – restricts physical fitness and diminishes youth participation in organized athletics.

Environmental pollution, climate change and impacts on health and livelihoods

77. Afro-Surinamese communities living in the interior face several environmental challenges that affect their well-being. One significant issue is the degradation of natural resources due to illegal gold-mining activities and deforestation. These activities not only harm the environment but also disrupt local ecosystems and livelihoods. Multinational companies with concessions for gold-mining utilize hazardous and chemicals, such as cyanide and mercury, in extraction processes, causing severe damage both to the environment and to human health. These issues are often compounded by climate change, which has triggered more frequent and severe flooding, particularly near waterways, disrupting and affecting local housing and agriculture. Poor waste management and limited access to clean drinking water further exacerbate health risks in these communities, as illustrated in the Koffi Kamp village. Addressing these issues requires sustainable State policies alongside community-driven solutions to protect both the environment and the people who depend on it.

F. Intersecting forms of discrimination

Protection of women and girls, children, young people and elderly people of African descent

78. Women of African descent in Suriname meet various and profound gender-related challenges that hinder their social and economic advancement as well as their well-being. They continue to suffer from the historical interconnectedness of racism and sexism, which manifests itself through systemic barriers across education, employment and healthcare due to discrimination and limited access to opportunities. Despite their abilities, their professional growth remains restricted by biases that undervalue their contributions to society. Social and economic inequalities exacerbate the struggles of women of African descent in securing housing, healthcare and financial independence. Many lack access to vital entrepreneurial support, which makes it harder to break free from cycles of poverty in which women of African descent are disproportionately represented. Gender-based violence against women of African descent in and outside their communities is another critical concern of the Working Group. It is often characterized by insufficient legal protections and inadequate and ineffective support systems, thus potentially jeopardizing their safety and rights.

79. Several challenges negatively affect children of African descent (boys and girls) in Suriname, disrupting their education opportunities, health and overall well-being. Early school dropout rates are a pressing concern, driven by several factors, including financial difficulties, unstable home environments and teenage pregnancies. Specially, the Working Group is very concerned about the early pregnancy rates of girls of African descent, at ages

as young as 12 or 13. Information gathered indicates that these rates are disproportionately high in districts such as Brokopondo and Marowijne.

80. According to data,[25] realization of sexual and reproductive health rights for Afrodescendent women and girls is inferior compared to other groups, especially when measured through indicators such as family planning, gender-based violence and sexual abuse, and preventable maternal deaths. Besides intersectional discrimination, poor data contributes to not addressing these challenges adequately. The several explanatory factors include poverty, cultural acceptance of early marriages and childbearing, and structural discrimination faced by these communities. These challenges underscore the need for effective prevention measures, including comprehensive sexual education and access to family planning resources, to mitigate their impact on education and life outcomes.

81. The sexual exploitation of children in prostitution has had devastating consequences for the physical and emotional health of affected children. Such exploitation of girls of African descent is reportedly high, especially in Maroon communities. The contributing factors include poverty and the failure of the child protection system to adequately identify, protect and support orphaned and undocumented children and girls. Despite measures taken by the State, such as awareness-raising in schools, the setting up of a hotline for complaints in some areas and in neighbourhoods and districts of the capital, and counselling services, efforts to combat this problem must include a holistic approach in order to understand why Afro-Surinamese children appear to be at a heightened risk of being subjected to sexual exploitation. Targeted interventions, including stricter enforcement of laws against the perpetrators and reinforced support systems, are necessary to prevent further exploitation and to support the recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of victims. In this respect, the Bureau of the Rights of the Child requires reinforcement in staffing and resources in order to tackle these challenges effectively. Strengthening this institution would enable better advocacy, monitoring and implementation of policies that protect children's rights.

82. The Working Group is concerned that elderly Afro-Surinamese individuals experience recurring difficulties in accessing adequate healthcare and struggle to afford the cost of medications and medical treatments. This is compounded by social isolation, which is reported as a growing significant issue, because traditional family support systems have been eroded due to urbanization, forced displacement and migration. The vulnerability of elderly Afro-Surinamese individuals is further exacerbated by financial insecurity due to inadequate pensions or depleted savings.

LGBTQI persons

83. Experiences compiled by the Working Group indicate that Afro-Surinamese LGBTQI persons navigate considerable daily impediments of their rights, including discrimination, social stigma, and restricted access to supportive resources both within their communities and in the broader national context. While there has been progress in awareness and in advocacy for equality, homophobia and transphobia nevertheless persist in Surinamese society, driven by cultural and religious biases. These barriers may result in LGBTQI persons being excluded from educational and employment opportunities and may also engender mental health issues due to isolation and a lack of acceptance.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

84. **The presence and history of people of African descent in Suriname is a testament to the spirit of resilience and resistance against the institutions of slavery, colonialism, racism and State neglect.**

85. **People of African descent in Suriname, particularly the Maroon tribal communities, remain in a precarious legal position.**

86. **While the Maroon tribes have successfully preserved their culture and autonomy for centuries, their future is threatened by a legal system that fails to recognize their**

[25] See https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_MM_Analysis-July2023.pdf.

collective rights. There is currently no domestic legal framework that provides for the collective titling of Maroon lands. The landmark, binding rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have provided a pathway for justice and accountability, yet the failure by the Surinamese State to comply with these judgments remains a legal issue that continues to infringe on the full enjoyment of human rights by people of African descent in Suriname.

87. **The following recommendations are intended to assist the State in its efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In light of the above, the Working Group recommends that the State:**

(a) **Promulgate the Second International Decade for People of African Descent (2025-2034), and fully utilize this vehicle to galvanize positive measures to secure a viable future for Surinamese of African descent;**

(b) **Publish the results of the 2024 census, translate them into the main languages spoken by communities in the country, and organize awareness-raising campaigns through community leaders and district authorities to disseminate them widely to people of African descent living in remote districts. Continue to collect disaggregated data, on the basis of the principle of self-identification, across civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; proactively publish and regularly update such data in accessible formats, subject to appropriate privacy and data-protection safeguards; and use them to design, implement and assess targeted policies to promote the inclusion of people of African descent. The Working Group encourages Surinamese of African descent to be counted as one demographic group;**

(c) **Adopt a comprehensive law against racial discrimination containing a definition thereof that is in accordance with article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, expressly prohibit racial profiling and racist hate speech in legislation, and define crimes and incidents, incitement of racial hatred, police violence, and systemic and structural racism – additionally, this law should guarantee a more effective and equal access to justice and other remedies for people of African descent; and conduct training for law enforcement officials, especially the police, and prosecutors, on racial discrimination issues and for them to detect, register and address cases of racial profiling;**

(d) **Accelerate the establishment of an independent national human rights institution in compliance with the Paris Principles, with competence to address issues of racial discrimination, including receiving and considering complaints filed by individuals and groups, and provide it with adequate resources to deliver its mandate fully; and consider establishing a standing national reparations commission in line with the work of the Caribbean Community;**

(e) **Enhance the capacity and opportunity for Afro-Surinamese civil society organizations to participate in the delivery of justice and development to Surinamese of African descent;**

(f) **Expedite the adoption of the Bill on the Collective Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, with adequate, meaningful and informed consultation with Surinamese of African descent;**

(g) **Accelerate the full implementation of the judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on land rights and natural resources, in consultation with the communities concerned, to ensure justice and accountability for Maroon tribal communities in Suriname;**

(h) **Return ancestral lands to people of African descent and/or provide just, fair and adequate compensation and agreed alternatives where this is not possible;**

(i) **Take the steps necessary to provide financial, educational, healthcare and other basic infrastructure in the hinterland, and ensure that development projects are conducted in all districts in the hinterland, with particular attention to the cities of Moengo, Totness and Albina, to Brokopondo district, and to urban and peri-urban areas with large concentrations of Afro-Surinamese;**

(j) **Take special measures to fully integrate and promote the advancement of Afro-Surinamese into the economic sector through reformed insurance and credit facilities, including for women of African descent;**

(k) **Ensure the participation of Afrodescendants in decisions, laws and regulations affecting them, especially with regard to lands and resources, ensuring that consultations are conducted in their native language, and that there are participation options for those who cannot read or write, and facilitate in-person registration of their organizations for those living in regions of the interior; and ensure more adequate representation of Surinamese of African descent in political and public affairs, including on elective and executive bodies and in high-ranking positions in the administration;**

(l) **Ensure that mining companies fulfil their obligation to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of their activities on neighbouring Afrodescendent communities, and ensure that revenues from the exploitation of natural resources in these areas meaningfully benefit these areas with regard to the provision of adequate infrastructure, facilities and job opportunities;**

(m) **Guarantee the implementation of a free, prior and informed consent process with the Afrodescendent communities concerned;**

(n) **Improve the conditions in places of deprivation of liberty, in particular at Santa Boma prison which is populated mostly by people of African descent, in line with international standards, and ensure the provision of food and water in sufficient quantities and of sufficient quality, and adequate sanitation for all persons deprived of their liberty, as well as education and training for inmates; and firmly address racial discrimination against people of African descent in the criminal justice system;**

(o) **Hold public authorities accountable for their efforts and commitment in eradicating anti-Black racism; and firmly combat stereotypes, negative perceptions and degrading expressions against people of African descent through education programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, and the prohibition of racial discrimination and the promotion of tolerance, and ensure that those perpetrating crimes such as incitement to hatred are prosecuted and punished, if convicted;**

(p) **Promptly address the healthcare facility issues faced by individuals of African descent in the interior, ensuring that the enjoyment of the right to health is accessible, adequate and affordable;**

(q) **Incorporate the history of people of African descent and their societal contributions into all educational curricula, including the history of colonialism, slavery, and the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, and provide training for teachers accordingly in this regard;**

(r) **Ensure the provision of primary education in Sranan Tongo, the most widely spoken language in Suriname, and implement Dutch and tribal language classes in regions where needed;**

(s) **Ensure that children of African descent have access to quality secondary and high school education in schools that are physically accessible and that have good-quality education, and teachers in sufficient numbers to allow children to acquire all skills necessary for pursuing either higher education or vocational training, to offer them equal opportunities and to cater for children with special needs;**

(t) **Implement a comprehensive and inclusive housing strategy to address the housing crisis affecting people of African descent in Suriname. This includes the expansion of affordable housing programmes, community-based development, infrastructure improvements, land allocation and urban planning, and the strengthening of legal frameworks;**

(u) **Fully implement the national action plans on artisanal and small-scale gold mining and on climate change adaptation;**

(v) **Adopt and implement a comprehensive equity-focused strategy aimed at addressing disparities among all genders, age groups and children of African descent – this involves adopting a comprehensive approach across all sectors and implementing enhanced and effective legal safeguards against discrimination. The State should take steps to support poverty alleviation for Afrodescendent women and foster more opportunities, including income-generating activities, and support Afrodescendent women engaged in farming. Engagement with community leaders and organizations is essential for developing culturally relevant solutions that empower Afrodescendent communities, especially women, to advance socially;**

(w) **Take steps to protect religious freedom for African-based religions and include their representatives in the Interreligious Council of Suriname;**

(x) **Take steps to ensure that people of African descent are fairly represented in the media and that programmes are designed to promote their culture, and increase the number of media professionals of African descent in the media;**

(y) **Enhance legal protections and promote inclusive environments to advance the well-being of Afro-Surinamese LGBTQI persons, and adopt and implement targeted policies and community initiatives to safeguard the well-being of elderly Afro-Surinamese individuals.**