

26 October 2011

## **Statement by the Tashaos, Councillors and Community members of the Upper Mazaruni**

Warwata, Upper Mazaruni

On this special day, Tashaos, Councillors and Community members from Waramadong, Warawata, Phillipai, Ominaik, Jawalla, Chinaweng and Kako have met to share our concerns in relation to the situation and problems that our peoples are facing in the Upper Mazaruni.

We are deeply concerned about projects and mining concessions being granted in the lands that are currently under the case in the High Court of Guyana, without informing the communities and not consulting to the proper authorities. As Tashao Norma Thomas from Warawata stated “we need to stand firm and let our voices be heard because no consultation was done.” We condemn the lack of respect to our land rights in this region. We urge the government and its different agencies to respect our rights to our lands and territories according to the 1959 boundaries.

Our communities are facing the negative impacts of what the government is calling “development” of our lands. Through the mining activities, many of which have been granted to foreigners and coastal persons. As stated by a leader “the women – adult and children - are being kidnapped and even males have been abused sexually by the coastal miners.” Also other impacts include the contamination of our rivers where miners are disposing waste into the waters of the rivers where we bathe, fish and even drink our water. “I was born in this land, the same as my ancestors, and coast landers should never take advantage over us and this should not be allowed any more”.

In the government's proposed “development”, Guyana is asking Village Councils to approve their Low Carbon Development Strategy which hasn't been properly consulted with our communities, in our language and according to our traditions. We are very concerned that the LCDS and it's

lack of consultation will result in proposed actions that will undermine our fundamental rights as indigenous peoples, specially with regards to our lands and resources.

It has also come to our attention that roads are being built close to our territory. We have demanded information to the authorities about these roads since we have not been consulted nor informed about their construction, as time goes by, the roads get closer to our communities and we know of cases where bandits use these roads to carry out their crimes, exposing farmers from satellite villages and even miners present in the region to these crimes.

In information that recently appeared in different national and international media, we have found out about the possible construction of the “Kurupung Hydro-project” formerly known as the Upper Mazaruni Dam. We are aware of its effects and consequences and all our communities strongly oppose to this project as our elders did in the 70s. As stated by one village leader: Our grandparents didn't accept the hydro-project in the past, the grandchildren including myself, share the position of our grandparents and say NO to the “Kurupung Project”

We have come together as Toshias and Councillors in the district and say NO to government-proposed projects. Our right to self-determination must be respected and it is up to us to determine the development that we want in our territory. Furthermore, we demand that our right to free, prior and informed consent is properly implemented, so that our children and their grandchildren can enjoy the lands that we have inherited from our ancestors.

Finally, we would like to call upon the government of Guyana, local organisations, political parties other governments, multilateral institutions, international organisations that our rights as indigenous peoples must be recognised and respected, as we fear that this situation may reach a point of no return with immeasurable impacts on our peoples, our territory and resources.