



GUYANA FORESTRY COMMISSION

1 Water Street, Kingston, P.O. Box 1017, Georgetown, Guyana.

Tel Nos. 592-226-7271-4, Fax: 592-226-8956

Website: www.forestry.gov.gy

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Statement from the Guyana Forestry Commission¹ on the Complaint by the APA on Guyana's ART TREES Application

It has been brought to the attention of the Guyana Forestry Commission, that the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) has raised grievances with the ART Secretariat, concerning the issuance of Guyana's ART-TREES credits for the period 2016-2020. The APA has called for the suspension of Guyana's credits.

The relevant ART grievance process should now address these matters, and Guyana will cooperate fully with this process. However, we also wish to highlight some relevant points.

The Guyana Forestry Commission views the allegations made in the APA's letter to be inaccurate, aimed at preventing indigenous villages from being a part of the forest carbon credits programme and thus stymieing village development, and distorting the work on REDD+ and forest governance in Guyana. The GFC wishes to state the following points:

Secret Communication without Village / Community Consultation

When purporting to represent indigenous peoples, non-governmental organisations are expected to consult with villages and communities. However, the APA did not share its letter to the ART Secretariat with indigenous people or their elected community representatives (Toshaos and Village Councils).

This violates the principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) – including the principle that villages and communities should be free to give or refuse their consent on matters which impact on them, through their own village-led processes. The APA's call for suspension of carbon credits – and therefore investment into Village Plans and Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) - clearly falls into this category.

Selective Participation in Consultation

For over two years, the APA has been invited to participate in, and to help lead, consultations across Guyana concerning the LCDS and ART-TREES. However, the APA was very selective in engaging in the consultation that it has now raised grievances about.

¹ Guyana Forestry Commission in its capacity as Lead Agency for Guyana on ART TREES

For example, the APA was asked to join other stakeholders on the LCDS Communications Sub-Committee– yet did not attend meetings or participate in any way. They neglected – even when asked – to come up with suggestions on addressing difficult challenges like finding translators fluent in local languages, leaving this work to others.

Furthermore, the APA was asked – like other members of the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee - to lead consultations. Unlike other members of the Steering Committee who led consultations, and gathered input and feedback, the APA never fulfilled this responsibility. After the consultation was completed, other members of the Steering Committee discovered that hundreds of the copies of the LCDS, given to the APA to help with consultation, were sitting in the APA’s headquarters in the city.

Yet now the APA raises unspecific complaints about a consultation it did not participate in and seeks to drown out the views and voices of indigenous leaders and other local stakeholders who did take part.

Performative Approach to Grievance Resolution

In its letter to ART-TREES, the APA has not mentioned that there are several grievance resolution mechanisms in Guyana that the APA could have accessed, yet chose not to do so, but instead waited for a long time to then raise a grievance with ART.

Given the major focus on land titling in the letter to the ART Secretariat, the APA should have mentioned that (i) the Land Titling project is being implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); (ii) the Land Titling project has its own dedicated grievance resolution mechanism which the APA was involved in designing and is managed by a Project Board of which the APA is a part.

Several grievances have been dealt with successfully over the years using this mechanism. As of today, there are no grievances before that grievance resolution mechanism.

Failure to Declare Political Involvement

As a non-governmental organization, the APA's members and leadership are free to engage in partisan politics, including standing for election. However, when purporting to represent non-partisan interests, it is important to declare relevant political allegiances to ensure transparency, and uphold credibility.

It is therefore relevant to point out that leading members of the APA are - and have been - politically active, including the Executive Director of the APA, Ms Jean La Rose, who was the Deputy Representative of the list of political party candidates of the PNC-Led Coalition which was in government between 2015 and 2020.

Ms La Rose was a leading candidate within the PNC-led Coalition’s list in the 2015 elections, and while she failed to win a seat in the National Assembly, the then-President appointed her to a senior Board position within the Coalition Government.

This should be declared as it has bearing on her commentary about public policy under various administrations.

Land Titling Inaccuracies

The latest letter from the APA contains largely inaccurate and/or out-of-date information concerning the land titling process.

Important facts that were omitted include (i) the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project aims to address all outstanding land titling requests by the end of 2024; (ii) the project is being implemented by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (MOAA) with United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as Partner Entity, performing Project Assurance and having fiduciary oversight; (iii) the Project Board is co-chaired by MOAA and UNDP; the APA is a Project Board member with voting rights and therefore forms part of the management of the Project.

The project is behind schedule because no progress was made during the period when the PNC-led Coalition was in government and determined for their own reasons not to prioritise indigenous land titling.

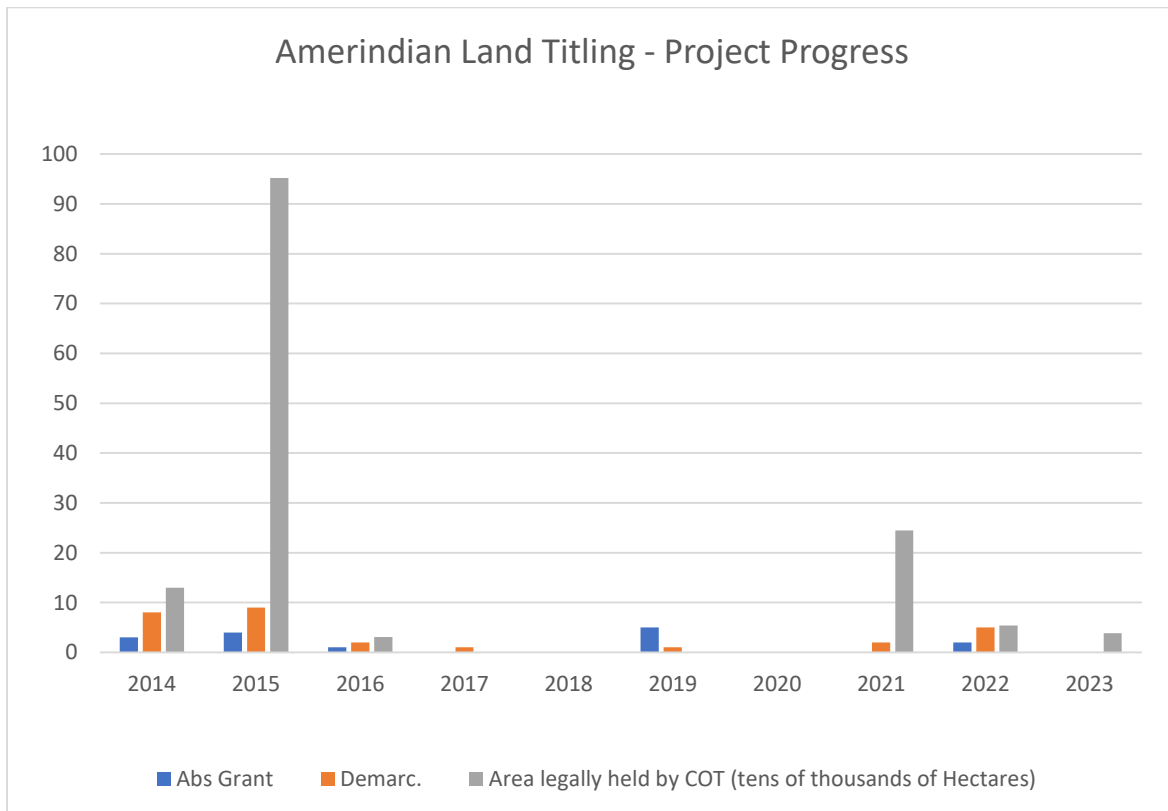
A summary of the situation regarding land titling should capture the following relevant facts:

- When democracy was restored in Guyana in 1992 – bringing to an end 28 years of PNC-led dictatorship – a total of 74 villages, approximately 6% of Guyana’s territory, were titled but many had not been demarcated.
- From 1992 to 2010, demarcation proceeded for the 74 villages and a further 22 were titled along with reformed legislation (including the 2006 Amerindian Act) and an improved policy/regulatory framework built around village-led process including elected representatives (Toshaos and Village Councils)
- In 2009, the original LCDS conceptualised the Amerindian Land Titling Project which would address all outstanding titling requests, utilising money received under the Guyana-Norway Agreement and implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
- In 2013, the project started, and during the periods 2013-2015, and 2020 to date, a total of 24 villages were demarcated. This is out of an overall project total of 28 demarcations to date.
- The 24 villages demarcated under the PPP/C led Government, including the two Certificates of Title prepared this year translates to 5,477.79 square miles or 1,418,741.61 hectares of legally held Amerindian lands. See chart below.
- During the period 2015-2020, when the PNC-led Coalition was once again in Government, a total of only 4 villages, covering 266.72 square miles or 69,090 hectares, were demarcated. Of these four villages, only 2 received their certificates of title thus giving legal ownership to 118.06 square miles of land or 30,577.4 hectares. In 2023, these two Certificates of Title have been processed under the present Government.

- The 2015-2020 Government also reduced the goals of the project to only 26 absolute grants of title (down from 45) and 40 demarcations (down from 68) – a decision that has now been reversed by the new Government so that the project’s goals are once again to address 100% of land titling requests.

These facts are relevant to the APA’s purported concerns about the titling process. A summary of the latest phase is provided in the following title.

Amerindian Land Titling –Area Demarcated since 2014



In conclusion, Guyanese citizens – including indigenous peoples and members of local forest communities – have a lot to be proud of in Guyana’s long-standing stewardship of the forests. They are creating a pathway to overcoming difficult issues for which there are no straight-forward answers and where the world will benefit from solutions. Most Guyanese stakeholders are demonstrating innovation and dedication in identifying solutions, as well as respect for others who are participating in the process.

Yet these people - thousands of citizens across hundreds of indigenous villages and local communities who are working hard to identify how to advance developmental priorities for their people – are totally unaware that the APA has called for the suspension of the finances to fund these priorities.

We believe that transparency and accountability are needed, so will call on the APA to share its letter to ART with the Guyanese public. We also hope that the ART grievance process can rapidly reach its conclusion, and the Government of Guyana, through the GFC, will be available to assist in any way.