WORLD EMBASSY DESK

WED Observation Report on Suriname

Preliminary Assessment and Notification

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1. Introduction

In light of multiple, credible indications of prolonged non-compliance with binding international obligations, the World Embassy Desk (WED) has formally launched an observation and investigation procedure concerning the Republic of Suriname. This initiative aligns with WED's foundational mission to uphold international law, encourage lawful conduct among States, and safeguard regional peace and institutional trust.

The decision to initiate this process was based on cumulative findings from international tribunals, human rights bodies, intergovernmental reports, and bilateral diplomatic exchanges that together suggest a pattern of legal inaction and institutional unwillingness on the part of Suriname. While Suriname is not a formal member of the WED, the organization exercises its right to monitor and report on non-member States where compelling legal and ethical interests are implicated, particularly when such conduct may endanger the stability of neighboring countries or the broader region.

The WED emphasizes that its intent is remedial, not punitive. The ultimate objective of this report and any future recommendations is to restore lawful compliance, uphold judicial integrity, and reestablish international trust in the Republic of Suriname as a sovereign actor.

2. Scope and Legal Basis of the Observation

The observation initiated by the WED is grounded in four domains of international legal concern. Each domain relates to the failure of Suriname to observe legal rulings or treaty obligations to which it is subject, either as a party to specific instruments or as a beneficiary of international adjudication. The WED's assessment draws upon primary sources including court judgments, treaty texts, reports from UN organs, communications from neighboring States, and documented statements from Surinamese authorities.

These four legal domains include:

1. Violations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and associated arbitral rulings;
2. Non-compliance with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) judgment in the Saamaka case;
3. Structural discrimination against Afro-descendant and Indigenous/Marron populations, as determined by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD);
4. The political alignment of Suriname in the Venezuela-Guyana territorial dispute and the implications for regional neutrality and sovereignty.

Each of these areas is elaborated in detail below.

3. Maritime Boundary Obligations under UNCLOS

In 2007, the Permanent Court of Arbitration rendered a binding decision[i] in the maritime boundary dispute between Suriname and Guyana. The tribunal determined that Suriname had committed a serious breach of international law by using naval force in June 2000 to expel a petroleum rig operating under license from the Government of Guyana. This action was classified as a violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter,[ii] which prohibits threats or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.

In addition, Suriname was found to be in breach of Articles 74(3) and 83(3) of UNCLOS,[iii] which require States to pursue interim practical arrangements in disputed maritime zones and to refrain from actions that could jeopardize or hamper peaceful resolution. The tribunal held that Suriname had not made adequate efforts to negotiate or settle provisional arrangements during the pendency of the dispute.

Article 74 Delimitation of the exclusive economic zone between States with opposite or adjacent coasts 1. The delimitation of the exclusive economic zone between States with opposite or adjacent coasts shall be effected by agreement on the basis of international law, as referred to in Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, in order to achieve an equitable solution. 2. If no agreement can be reached within a reasonable period of time, the States concerned shall resort to the procedures provided for in Part XV. **3. Pending agreement as provided for in paragraph 1, the States concerned, in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, shall make every effort to enter into provisional arrangements of a practical nature and, during this transitional period, not to jeopardize or hamper the reaching of the final agreement. Such arrangements shall be without prejudice to the final delimitation.** 4. Where there is an agreement in force between the States concerned, questions relating to the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of that agreement.
Article 83 Delimitation of the continental shelf between States with opposite or adjacent coasts 1. The delimitation of the continental shelf between States with opposite or adjacent coasts shall be effected by agreement on the basis of international law, as referred to in Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, in order to achieve an equitable solution. 2. If no agreement can be reached within a reasonable period of time, the States concerned shall resort to the procedures provided for in Part XV. **3. Pending agreement as provided for in paragraph 1, the States concerned, in a spirit of understanding and cooperation, shall make every effort to enter into provisional**

arrangements of a practical nature and, during this transitional period, not to jeopardize or hamper the reaching of the final agreement. Such arrangements shall be without prejudice to the final delimitation.

4. Where there is an agreement in force between the States concerned, questions relating to the delimitation of the continental shelf shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of that agreement.

WED notes with concern that despite the passage of nearly two decades, there is no clear public evidence that Suriname has implemented institutional safeguards or issued formal policies to prevent recurrence of similar breaches. The lack of bilateral initiatives with Guyana on maritime de-escalation mechanisms and the absence of reported legal reforms indicate systemic inertia. This raises the possibility of future destabilization if the underlying legal conflict remains unresolved.

4. Implementation of the IACtHR Saamaka Judgment

The 2007 ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in *Saramaka People v. Suriname*[iv] established Suriname's duty to recognize and legally protect the collective land and resource rights of the Saamaka people. It mandated that any development activities within Indigenous and tribal territories be subject to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) by the affected communities.

Despite this clear ruling, multiple international and civil society reports[v] document ongoing extractive activities on Saamaka territory without such consent. Infrastructure expansion, logging, and mining operations continue under concession regimes that fail to meet international legal standards. To date, no comprehensive land titling or legislative framework for Indigenous or Maroon communities has been enacted.

The WED considers this prolonged non-implementation a severe violation of both the American Convention on Human Rights[vi] and customary principles concerning the rights of Indigenous peoples. This failure not only perpetuates legal uncertainty but actively harms communities whose livelihoods, culture, and territorial identity are jeopardized by continued encroachment.

5. Structural Discrimination and ICERD/ICCPR Obligations

Reports issued by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)[vii] and various human rights experts[viii] have repeatedly criticized Suriname for systemic and institutional discrimination against Afro-descendant and Indigenous/Marron populations. The concerns identified include:

- Lack of recognition and protection of collective land tenure;
- Absence of culturally inclusive education policies and language rights;
- Environmental and health risks in rural and extractive zones (e.g., mercury contamination);
- Gender-based exploitation in remote areas;
- Exclusion from effective political and administrative participation.

The WED's preliminary review confirms that Suriname has made minimal progress in addressing these structural issues. No significant reforms have been implemented to align domestic law with the obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)[ix] and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[x] Without demonstrable corrective action, these violations constitute not only breaches of treaty law but pose long-term threats to internal cohesion and democratic legitimacy.

6. Political Conduct in the Venezuela-Guyana Territorial Dispute

While Suriname is not a direct party to the territorial dispute over the Essequibo region between Venezuela and Guyana, it has consistently expressed public support and engaged in regional diplomatic actions that align with Guyana's position. Such actions include political endorsements, map publications,[xi] and coordinated votes in regional bodies.

While Suriname retains the sovereign right to adopt foreign policy positions, WED is concerned that Suriname's stance may be interpreted as partiality in a sensitive territorial conflict, thereby undermining the principle of neutrality and potentially fueling broader regional tensions.

WED has therefore engaged the Government of Venezuela for consultation and information exchange and continues to monitor this aspect of Suriname's conduct for further legal and political implications.

7. Conclusions and Forward Outlook

The World Embassy Desk concludes that there is sufficient prima facie evidence of serious and sustained non-compliance by the Republic of Suriname with multiple layers of binding international legal

obligations. This observation has prompted consultations with affected States, regional stakeholders, and international legal experts.

WED will continue to gather data and testimony in cooperation with national authorities, civil society, and international institutions. Should Suriname fail to provide a credible and timely response, the WED may consider issuing formal diplomatic advisories, recommending economic and institutional measures, and elevating the matter to relevant UN and regional bodies.

WED reiterates that its objective is restorative: to facilitate lawful redress, support institutional reform, and prevent further destabilization through principled, multilateral action. It calls on the Government of Suriname to engage constructively and immediately in dialogue.

World Embassy Desk
06 August 2025

[i] Permanent Court of Arbitration, Guyana v. Suriname, Award, 17 September 2007.
Source (official PDF): *https://legal.un.org/riaa/cases/vol_xxx/1-144.pdf*

[ii] United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, signed on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco, entered into force on 24 October 1945.
Available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1

[iii] United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adopted on 10 December 1982, entered into force on 16 November 1994.
Articles 74(3) and 83(3).
Available at: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

[iv] Case Title: *Saramaka People v. Suriname*
Court: Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR)
Judgment Date: November 28, 2007
Citation: I/A Court H.R., *Case of the Saramaka People v. Suriname*, Judgment of November 28, 2007, Series C No. 172

- IACtHR official website: https://www.corteidh.or.cr
- Direct PDF link to the English version of the judgment: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_172_ing.pdf

[v] *Cited Reports and Documents Confirming Ongoing Violations of the Saamaka Judgment*

1. International Land Coalition (ILC) / LandMark
   Title: *"New data reveals illegal logging is devastating Suriname's forests"*
   Date: June 28, 2024
   Key finding: Satellite and concession data show that approximately 447,000 hectares (32%) of Saamaka territory have been granted as logging or mining concessions without Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
   Link: https://www.landcoalition.org/en/latest/new-data-reveals-illegal-logging-is-devastating-surinames-forests
2. Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)
   Title: *"Saamaka Toko: A battle to secure and protect the land rights of the Saamaka people in Suriname"*
   Date: March 18, 2024
   Key finding: Highlights the unauthorized construction of a 42.7 km road deep into Saamaka territory, along with extractive activities and timber concessions granted without consent, in direct violation of the IACtHR ruling.
   Link: https://rightsandresources.org/blog/saamaka-toko-a-battle-to-secure-and-protect-the-land-rights-of-the-saamaka-people-in-suriname

3. The Guardian (Global Development section)
   Title: *"'Dirty political games': Suriname is selling its gold and timber – at the cost of tribal land rights"*
   Date: February 21, 2024
   Key finding: In-depth report on how Suriname continues to sell mining and timber concessions on tribal lands without legal safeguards or community participation.
   Link: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/feb/21/suriname-loggers-miners-forests-deforestation-saamaka

4. Both ENDS (in collaboration with CIRAD, RRI, ILC)
   Title: *"Illegal logging is devastating Suriname's forest: The Saamaka and their fight against deforestation"*
   Date: 3 July 2023
   Key finding: Detailed monitoring report showing large-scale illegal logging in Saamaka territory, the absence of FPIC, and the lack of implementation of the Saamaka judgment 16 years after its issuance.
   Link: https://www.bothends.org/en/Whats-new/News/Illegal-logging-is-devastating-Surinames-forest-The-Saamaka-and-their-fight-against-deforestation
   https://d3o3cb4w253x5q.cloudfront.net/media/documents/2024_ilc_report_saamaka_spread.pdf
5. EOS Data Analytics (EOSDA)
   Title: *"The Decades-Long Story of Saamaka: The Forest Defenders"*
   Date: December 11, 2023
   Key finding: Combines satellite imagery and local testimony to expose continuing illegal deforestation, infrastructure development, and lack of state protection for Saamaka communities.
   Link: https://eos.com/blog/decades-long-story-of-saamaka-the-forest-defenders

[vi] Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights ("Pact of San José, Costa Rica"), adopted on 22 November 1969, entered into force on 18 July 1978.
Available at: https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.pdf

[vii] United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Seventy-eighth Session Supplement No. 18, adopted on 30 August 2023, A/78/18
Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/18

[viii] Observations on the State of Indigenous Human Rights in Suriname prepared for United Nations Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review, March 2021
Available at:
https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=8877&file=EnglishTranslation & https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/UPR%20Suriname%202021_%20CS%20-MF-VIDS%20%281%29.pdf

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[ix] International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
Adopted: 21 December 1965
Entered into force: 4 January 1969
Depositary: United Nations
Citation: United Nations, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX), 21 December 1965.
Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial

[x] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
Adopted: 16 December 1966
Entered into force: 23 March 1976
Depositary: United Nations
Citation: United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966.
Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

[xi] Ramraj, Robert (2002) "Guyana's Border Disputes with Venezuela and Suriname," *The Geographical Bulletin*: Vol. 44: Iss. 1, Article 6.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/thegeographicalbulletin/vol44/iss1/6