



**The Future in our Hands:
Addressing the Leadership Challenge of Climate Change
A High-Level Event convened by the Secretary-General**

S T A T E M E N T

BY

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Excellencies:

The Government of Guyana welcomes this initiative by the United Nations Secretary General to promote dialogue and mobilise support at the highest political level for action on climate change.

The task before us is to identify actions and establish the means by which we can as a global collective implement these actions in a timely and effective manner.

Guyana is a developing country with a negligible contribution to current high levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. However, with 90% of the population occupying a coastal belt that is approximately 1 metre below mean sea level, we are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This poses a serious threat to efforts towards poverty alleviation and achieving millennium development goals for sustainable development.

Guyana's vulnerability was vividly demonstrated by a massive flood in 2005 which was estimated to have led to losses equivalent to approximately 60% of the country's GDP.

While recognising that a global response is required to address climate change, and facing the need as a developing country to grow our economy, Guyana is taking deliberate action for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Our vast, intact forest resources represent a critical asset base for global climate change mitigation. With increasing pressures for commercial exploitation, Guyana has decided to maintain extensive portions of our forests in their pristine state, developing a forest management approach based on conservation and sustainable harvesting and utilisation. The conservation approach through which approximately half million hectares is under direct conservation, has realised a number of flagship initiatives. Principal among these are

- Iwokrama International Programme for Rainforest Conservation and Development;

- the Conservation Concession in collaboration with Conservation International which represents an effort to develop a working model for compensation for environmental services;
- and efforts towards establishing a National System of Protected Areas.

A system of sustainable forest utilisation, based on reduced impact logging and value-adding, with stringent oversight through supporting policy, legislation, and institutional framework, as well as stakeholder support has allowed Guyana to maintain a large forest cover of approximately 16 Million hectares, representing about 75% of total land area in the country as a sink for carbon.

Regrettably, efforts to manage our forests in a sustainable manner are not encouraged by the current framework for climate change. In particular, the Kyoto Protocol and its Clean Development Mechanism provide no recognition nor adequate compensation for the contributions of standing forests towards climate change mitigation. In fact, the current approaches penalise countries with low deforestation rates through reduced value of carbon credits.

There is clearly a need for a global agenda to:

- Recognise the contributions of standing forests towards addressing climate change through avoided deforestation, carbon sequestration and ecosystem services
- Make urgent change to the current perverse arrangement which provides a disincentive for forest conservation and protection
- Take into consideration opportunity costs, and develop financial models to provide adequate compensation and incentives for maintaining standing forests through conservation and sustainable use
- Provide increased and easily accessible financial resources as well as capacity building for climate change mitigation by developing countries as the current

mechanisms, in particular the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism has not proven to be effective, thus far.

In promoting efforts for the mitigation of climate change there is a need to recognise the special circumstances and vulnerability of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States and to give priority for support of actions in responding to climate change.

Mr. Chairman, this forum provides us with an opportunity to put an end to the culture of protracted negotiations and inactivity in relation to agreed actions. The message by the IPCC is clear. The experiences in relation to increased storms and extreme weather events remind us that climate change is a reality and the impact will be even greater if the rate of greenhouse gas emissions is not addressed.

Mitigation efforts will only improve if the international community provides an encouraging framework for their development.

Thank you.