

Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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Suriname

Suriname is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the Americas. In 2010 it was ranked 36th out of 175 countries in the 2010 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. Some media members continue to practice occasional self-censorship, due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership.

Murder trial for Desi Bouterse

The murder trial for Suriname's former dictator Desi Bouterse resumed on 15 October 2010 for the first time since he returned to power as the elected president by the parliament on 19 July 2010, but the judge postponed it again after none of the defense witnesses appeared to testify. Desi Bouterse and 11 associates are charged in the December 1982 slaying of 15 politicians, journalists and others who opposed his military dictatorship. A soldier by profession, Bouterse first came to power in a coup on 25 February 1980 and went on to run the country with an iron hand for two periods, 1980-1987 and 1990-1991, violating fundamental human rights with no compunction.

Bouterse has accepted "political responsibility" for the so-called December killings but denied a direct role. While leader of the main opposition party, he tried several times to get parliament to pass an amnesty law. As president he is not required to testify, and if convicted he could potentially engineer a pardon and avoid a 20-year sentence. The victims were allegedly taken by soldiers to Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo and shot one by one. Two days after the killings, Bouterse said in a televised statement that the 15 men had been shot while trying to flee police detention.

Land Rights

In August of 2008, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled on Suriname's request for an interpretation of a November 2007 judgment by the Court regarding logging and mining concessions on the territory of the Saramaka People. The Saramaka People, descend from escaped African slaves who established settlements in Suriname's rainforest interior in the 17th and 18th century. The Court's judgment established that: "The State violated, to the detriment of the members of the Saramaka people, the right to property".

Prisons and detention centers

Prison and detention center conditions are poor. Female and male prisoners are held separately in three prisons. There were also 19 smaller jails, or temporary detention centers, in police stations throughout the country. Most of these facilities, particularly the older jails, are unsanitary and seriously overcrowded. As of October 17, 2009, the 19 jails and three prisons held 584 men and 30 women. At year's end the three main prisons and the main pretrial detention center that opened in December 2008 held 915 persons. Violence among prisoners is common. In a letter addressed to an attorney's office in November, prisoners from the Santo Boma prison complained of inadequate food provisions, limited ventilation, mistreatment by prison guards as well as insufficient of rehabilitation programs.

Pretrial detention facilities are overcrowded. Growing numbers of convicted prisoners are held in pretrial detention cells due to prison overcrowding. Due to staff shortages, police officers rarely permitted detainees to leave their cells.

Corruption

In 2009, the Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), an office within the Police Department, that investigates complaints against members of the police force, received 189 complaints and launched 57 investigations into cases involving narcotics, bribery, and other types of police misconduct.

Indigenous peoples

Most Amerindians – who make up for three percent of the population – are economically disadvantaged and have only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs are concentrated in the capital Paramaribo. The majority of Amerindians live in the interior of the country, where government services are seldom available. Amerindians and Maroons suffer from illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining.