



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Written by the WDP Committee of Suriname

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“All God’s creation is very good!”

Country Background Information

Geography and population

The Republic of Suriname lies in the northeastern part of South America. Suriname is named after the Surinen tribe, one of the indigenous peoples of the land.

Suriname is part of the Guianas, an ecological region within the Amazon. The word Guiana comes from a Kaliña word, meaning “land of many waters”. Suriname has many rivers and creeks. Over 90% of the country is covered by pristine tropical rainforest with a high biodiversity.

Suriname has a humid tropical climate. The average temperature during the day is 27.1° C. January is the coldest month (averaging 26.1°C) and the hottest month is October (averaging 28.3°C).

Nowadays, the country has approximately 540,000 inhabitants. We have a multi ethnic population consisting of indigenous peoples (approx. 20,300), African descendants (Creoles and Maroons; approx. 206,400) and also Asian descendants (Hindustani, Javanese and Chinese people; approx. 230,300). Approximately 84,500 are comprised of European descendants, Lebanese and ‘new’ immigrants from countries like Guyana, Brazil, and Haiti,

About 90% of the population of Suriname lives in the coastal areas, of which more than half in the capital city of Paramaribo, which is situated on the left bank of the Suriname River. The name Paramaribo is believed to have been drawn from an indigenous word meaning ‘city of flowers’.

There are almost 400,000 Surinamese or descendants living in diaspora. They had emigrated either to former Netherlands Antilles, Netherlands or USA in search of opportunities. This is almost as many as the current population in the country.

Ten percent, predominantly the majority of the indigenous peoples and the Maroons communities live in the vast forests of the interior. The population density is only 3.5 inhabitants per km², one of the lowest numbers in the world.

The coastal area of Suriname, covers approximately 15% of the land surface and is not only important for residential purposes, but also for its economic activity (agriculture and industrial activity especially). However, this part of the country is less than two meters above the sea level and because of climate change and rising sea waters faces eventual floods.

The ethnic diversity implies a variety of cultures, religions and languages. Sranan tongue was developed during the colonial period. It was the language used among the slaves of various plantations. Now, it is the language spoken among the different ethnic groups. The official language is Dutch, a remnant from the last colonizer of Suriname.

The historical center of Paramaribo, placed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, is characterized by old buildings from the times of the Dutch and English colonization. The

Cathedral-Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul is the highest wooden structure in South America. The Fort Zeelandia, constructed entirely out of red bricks, has high historical value.

Due to historical and colonial development, Suriname belongs both to Caribbean and South America organizations like CARICOM (Caribbean Community) and UNASUR (Union of South-American Nations). Suriname is also a member of multilateral organizations such as the OAS (Organization of American States), the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific States) and the United Nations.

Suriname is a (co)sponsor to the Resolution to achieve the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 and signed the Declaration together with other United Nation member states. Community land is a controversial issue in Suriname. Both the indigenous peoples and the runaway slaves who formed the Maroons communities in the interior are seeking for their Land Rights in the districts of Para and Coronie. It is a long process that involves those communities and the government, and had received the support of community based organizations and international organizations such as the OAS.

Freedom of religion is laid down in the Constitution. Religions that are practiced in Suriname are Christianity (approx. 48.4%), Hinduism (approx. 22.2%), Islam (approx. 13.8%), Traditional Religions (approx. 1.8%), Javanism (approx. 0.8%) and a small percentage of the Jewish faith and other religions. Significant to mention is that Mosque Keizerstraat (original wooden building from 1932) was built adjacent to Synagogue Neve Shalom (original wooden building inaugurated in 1723) in Paramaribo.

Environment and biodiversity

Suriname is a country of beauty and high biodiversity. There are 715 species of birds. The giant sea turtles flock to sandy beaches like Galibi and Matapica, to lay their eggs. There are many orchids and over 60 species of heliconias (lobster claw flower).

The Nature Conservation Act and the Hunting and Shooting Act came into effect in 1954. They are the first laws concerning the protection of nature and conservation. By 1994, 5% of Surinamese soil was protected in the form of 13 nature reserves, one nature park (Brownsberg) and one Multiple Use Management Area (Bigi Pan).

Today, about 15% of the land surface is a protected territory. The biggest nature reserve is the Central Suriname Nature Reserve, which was established in 1996. Because of the mountainous areas, rapids in the rivers, savannah soil with rock formations and the remarkable vegetation (orchids, ferns, palm trees, plants and trees) and animal wildlife, this nature reserve has been placed on UNESCO's list of Heritage Sites.

The entire Surinamese coast, except for the territories north of the Greater Paramaribo region, have been designated as special management areas. Hunting and collecting eggs is prohibited in breeding grounds where birds and sea turtles come to lay their eggs.

In 1998, the National Institute for Environment and Development in Suriname (NIMOS) was established. Its objective is to regulate and monitor the environmental activity in Suriname.

A forest management system was developed in the 1970s by the Centre for Agricultural Research in Suriname (CELOS) in order to establish a more sustainable form of forestry. This system has been copied by larger nations, such as Brazil and Venezuela, for the development of their own forestry industry.

The country is signatory in various international treaties like Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Waterbirds and Wetlands, Convention on the International Trade on Endangered Species and also the Convention on Biodiversity and Agenda 21.

Political History

After Columbus arrived in America in 1492, there was an influx of Europeans to the 'New World', particularly from Spain and Portugal, in search of the Gold Coast. Spanish seafarers led by Alonso de Ojeda arrived in Suriname in 1499. Subsequently, the country was captured by the French, the English, the Zealanders and the Netherlands for short periods of time. The English ruled Suriname from 1651 to 1667, but as a result of the war between the Netherlands and England, Suriname was exchanged by New Amsterdam (presently New York, USA), a Dutch settlement at the time. Since then, Suriname was a Dutch colony until its independence in 1975.

The gold rush proved unsuccessful in the colony and plantations were developed to cultivate sugar cane, coffee, tobacco, cocoa and cotton. The plantations were implanted on a slavery based economy, initially over the indigenous peoples but they were replaced by the transatlantic slavery trade. With the end of slavery, indentured labourers from the Dutch colonies like India (1873–1916) and Indonesia (1890–1910) were contracted to work on the plantations. As early as 1853, Chinese and Portuguese from the island of Madeira were also brought to work in Suriname as indentured laborers.

Beginning in 1502 over 300,000 Africans were brought to Suriname and forced to work as slaves on the plantations. Many slaves ran away to freedom from the plantations and started a community in the interior, known as Maroon villages. They fought against the plantation owners and the colonial government to get other slaves to run away with them. The most famous Maroon leaders were Baron, Boni and Joli Coeur, who were captured and burned to death publicly.

It was not until 1814 that the slave trade to the colonies (including Suriname) was abolished. But slavery continued until 1863 in Suriname, when this inhumane form of labor ended.

The former slaves were required to work for their former owners on the plantations under state supervision for ten more years for minimal wages. Just after this period, they were allowed to find their own jobs, however with no training or any other policy provisions to include them in the new economy, the unemployment rate was extremely high.

In 1948, Suriname achieved self-government, which meant that Suriname could have a saying in their own internal affairs, but for international affairs they were still under the supervision and control of Netherlands. On November 25th, 1975 after much diplomatic negotiation Netherland agreed to give Suriname full independence. Its first President was also the last Governor of the self-government period, J. Ferriër. A Prime Minister, Henck Arron, stood at the head of the government much like it was the case in the other countries of the Caribbean.

On the 25th of February 1980 a military coup d'état changed the political system. The president and ministers were selected by the military.

On December 8th 1982 the country was shocked by the killings of 15 men by the military. Among them were lawyers, journalists, activists, and militaries who were accused of planning to take over the government. There has been an uncompleted trial; and the families'

demands for justice haven't been met yet. This is a delicate situation that still causes pain in Suriname.

On July 21st 1986 a Maroon former soldier, Ronny Brunswijk, rebelled against the military rule led by Comdr. Desi Bouterse. The internal war started in the east of Suriname forcing many of the Maroon people to seek refuge in French Guiana or flee to the city of Paramaibo. It was not until 1986 that a peace agreement between the government and the rebel group, known as Jungle Commando, was concluded.

Until the end of military government in 1987, the Constitution has been put aside. Now based on the new Constitution, democratic elections have been restored and the head of government is an executive president.

Economy

During the colonial period, before 1863, Suriname had an agricultural economy based on slave work and the exportation of sugar, coffee, cocoa and cotton mainly to the Netherlands. During World War I, the United States started mining for bauxite in Suriname. Bauxite was the raw material for aluminum, which was necessary in the aircraft industry.

With the decline of bauxite mining and Suriname's political independence in 1975, the diversification of the economy has been placed at the forefront. Small scale gold miners, exports of red or grey snapper and tuna fish and the recovery of agriculture with the supply of regional markets with rice, fruit, vegetables and cassava are the signs of a new economy.

Even though there are two international gold mining companies very active in the country, there is also illegal mining. Surinamese and foreigner miners (such as the Brazilian 'porknockers') are illegally mining and damaging the environment. High-pressure hoses are used to dislodge sediment, loosen it and mine gold dust, and sometimes gold nuggets, from it. As a result, huge areas of forest have disappeared, making way for enormous craters and desert-like landscapes. The water in rivers and creeks has been polluted by the mercury used by the 'porknockers'. The level of mercury found in fish and in people's body in the interior is believed to be much higher than internationally accepted standards. At the moment, Suriname hasn't decided to become a party to the Minamata Convention, which deals with issues such as the use of mercury in mining.

Gold and crude oil are the country's greatest sources for foreign currency. Oil wells are drilled by Staatsolie, the State Oil Suriname. Nowadays the government is also looking into the global demand for fresh drinking water, by extracting water from subterranean water sources.

In 1995, the World Bank classified Suriname as the seventeenth richest country in the world for its natural resources.

Education

Education is required for children from 7 to 12 years old, but there is no compulsory school attendance. This law was introduced in 1876 and was never amended. There is no required education in place for preschoolers.

Education in Suriname is based on the Dutch educational system. The plantation owners sent their children (boys and girls) at an early age to study in Europe, while the enslaved children were educated in the country in church schools.

The Moravian and the Roman Catholic Churches were given permission to educate the enslaved, Maroons and indentured laborers, particularly their children (both boys and girls). Initially their access to education in Christian schools meant to ‘win souls for the Lamb’. The colonial government was convinced that the enslaved and the Maroons would be less aggressive towards their slave masters, and/or the colonial government, as they were to “patiently bear their cross in this life, so as to receive even greater glory beyond.”

Today, the government is responsible for education, but there are also church and private schools across the country. Up to the secondary level, public or church schools are free as the government subsidizes both systems. In remote areas, education is offered in nucleus centers and boarding schools. There is a need for adult education and Second Chance Education for young people who drop-out.

University and higher professional educations are not free, but students may be eligible for scholarships, or recently created education credit with interest-free loans. Of concern, it is significant the number of boys who drop out of school. In fact, in secondary schools, the percentage of girls who attend school is remarkably higher (approx. 64%) than that of boys (approx. 36%) and at university and higher professional educational levels the difference is even greater: 75% of women as opposed to 25% of men.

Health care

There are six hospitals, five of which are in Paramaribo. One of the hospitals is an academic hospital. There are various health care centers in the districts and in the interior, 360 medical health locations (which amounts to 1 doctor for every 1,500 inhabitants) and 166 specialists.

Cardiovascular diseases (5.6% of the population) and diabetes (13% of the population) are respectively the first and the fourth cause of death in Suriname. According to the World Health Organization 10% of men and 30% of women are obese, and 20.8% of the population suffers high blood pressure. Suriname has therefore committed to implement the programs from Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations and take more preventive measures with regard to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

Different churches in Suriname have played an important role sending their medical missions to attend people affected by malaria, HIV and AIDS, and other diseases with high occurrences in the interior of Suriname.

The main responsibility for the prevention of dengue, chikungunya, and zika in Suriname relies with the Bureau for Public Healthcare. They keep the population informed on how to combat the mosquitos and to prevent themselves from getting sick. The Bureau occasionally goes out into neighborhoods to monitor and collect the bulky waste in order to prevent the mosquitoes from laying eggs.

For illnesses that cannot be treated in Suriname there are arrangements to refer patients abroad, for example to Columbia, the Netherlands or Cuba. A major part of the treatment costs is covered by the National Health Insurance Fund (SZF).

All children between the ages of 0 and 17, as well as senior citizens from 60 years old are entitled to free medical care through the Social Security system. Furthermore, the Basic Health Insurance Act, which became effective in 2014, also provides obligatory health insurance to all workers, which is paid by the employer and employee. The economically disadvantaged person may wholly or partially qualify for medical treatment at the expense of the government.

With regard to suicide and drug addiction, the numbers among both men and women are alarming. According to the Suriname Bureau of Statistics, suicide related deaths rose from 2000 to 2008. In 2010 there were 137 suicides and in 2011, 127 cases were registered. Just as in previous years, more than 70% of these cases were male.

The situation of women and children

Women's suffrage was only granted fully in 1948. In 1936 women were able to stand for election, but they were not allowed to vote. That right was reserved for men only. However, the first female Member of Parliament was Grace Schneiders-Howard, who was elected in 1938. Dr. Sophie Redmond is worth mentioning as a woman who broke new grounds in the areas of public health and politics. She was the first female doctor in the country. She dedicated her life to fight for accessible basic sanitation and nutrition education.

During the elections on May 25th, 2015, approximately 31% of the candidates for the representative bodies were women. In these elections, 15 female members of Parliaments were elected (29.4%) and for the third time a woman was the Parliament Chairperson. The cabinet of ministers that took office on August 12th, 2015 consisted of 3 women out of a total of 16 men (18.75%).

Married women did not have the same civil rights as their spouses. Managing the possessions within the marriage was a privilege of the husband. He was authorized to sell the home and all the belongings without the wife's consent. On April 16th, 1981 the National Decree C-11, granted women equal legal capacity. According to the Explanatory Memorandum the basis for this was the constitutional principle of equality for all citizens, regardless of their gender.

Suriname has a special law for Asian marriages, where people are allowed to be married by the customary rules of their Hindu or Islam traditions, even though they have to register the religious marriage at the Central Office. Since 2003, the legal position of the Asian woman has improved, particularly concerning the grounds for divorce and inheritance.

In March 1993, the Suriname government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and on February 19th, 2002, the OAS Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women.

With these Conventions and the creation of the National Bureau for Gender Policies (within the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and the Domestic Violence Bureau (at the Ministry of Justice and Police), the country set off on a course to strengthen the rights of women at the national level. However, the laws and policies to combat domestic violence at an early stage protect not only women, but also men, children, parents, grandparents, and other family members.

Suriname joined the 189 member states who signed The United Nations Millennium Declaration, and also the present Sustainable Development Goals. The Suriname Millennium Goals report for the United Nations showed that the country has successfully reached most of the goals to reduce poverty by September 2015. For instance, malaria-related deaths have been eradicated; HIV and AIDS deaths and infections have been reduced by more than half. Also, there was progress in mother-and- child-care as prenatal care and timely immunizations have been provided, and breastfeeding for at least six months has been promoted.

Despite that progress, many are still deprived of fundamental human rights, such as access to housing. Women are heads of the household in 31% of the homes in Suriname while only 80% have applied for a house provided by the government.

The interests of the child are protected both in the Surinamese Constitution, who is signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and on national laws. A law from 18 February 2000 eliminated the distinction between legitimate and natural children in the law of inheritance. Yet, there are still hidden forms of violation of their rights, like child labor. The sight of children selling fruit in the streets and in front of shops in town has become quite common. More serious is the fact that children also seem to be actively involved in working in the gold mines of the interior. The gravity of mercury poisoning and the subsequent decline in health seems to be severely underestimated by the government and society alike. It is therefore important that the government and society, if necessary with international support, come up with structural solutions to this problem.

The National Youth Institute was established in November 1999 as a consultative body for young people, and it has greatly stimulated the development of young people. CARICOM Youth Ambassadors represent young people in the CARICOM Heads of State meeting, where they are given the opportunity to discuss their issues. In the Youth Parliament, young Surinamese discuss their situation and submit proposals to the government to improve their condition in society.

Culture

Each ethnic group brings its own language, traditions and religion from its native country. Adding ethnic diversity to the cultural riches of the native inhabitants of Suriname, and there is a country blessed with a wide variety of art, literature, music, clothing, dance and drama. In addition the multi-ethnic cuisine with a variety of dishes, spices, ingredients, and cooking techniques adds to the diversity of foods. It is therefore difficult to indicate a national dish. However, rice is common to almost all groups of the population.

For typical drinks, you can find orgeade (sweet, flavored, cloudy syrup made from barley, almonds, sugar and water), ginger beer, dawet (lemongrass syrup, a swirl of coconut milk, and a splash of water) or local beer.

In terms of dishes, the indigenous peoples like to cook the ‘Peprewatra’ (soup with meat or fish and a lot of peppers) with cassava bread; while the Maroons will serve the ‘Afinji’ or ‘Apiti’ soup (with fish and cassava dumplings). The festive meal of the Creole people should have rice, ‘pom’ a dish made from a certain yellow kind of nature fruit, ‘pastei’ (a chicken pie) and ‘brown beans’, but for the Hindustani it is important to have the roti (flat bread) with chicken, vegetables and ‘dhal’ (yellow split peas). Meanwhile, for the Javanese, a rice table would include fried rice and fried noodles, and vegetables with peanut sauce. And the Chinese certainly will have their chow mein.

Snacks and desserts from the Creole kitchen include fiadu (strips of yeast dough filled with butter, cinnamon, sugar, almond, raising, and pineapple) boyo (cake made with cassava and coconut, raisins, egg, vanilla extract and some flour, dosi (cassava bread) and dokun (grated cassava mixed with coconut and rolled in a banana leaf and steamed). The djelebie (sweet fried dough) from the Hindustani, the crêpes with coconut filling and lapiz (pudding), banana chips and cassava chips from the Javanese, the sweet mooncakes and ‘ba pao’ (steamed bread stuffed with meat) from the Chinese.

There are some special celebrations that are rich in multiculturalism.

- Easter holidays: a four-day road march with festive clothing, song and dance.
- Emancipation Day, July 1st, commemorates the abolition of African slavery.

- The last day of the year (31st of December) is commemorated with a marathon of fireworks in the center of the city.
- Caribbean Festival of Arts: (Carifesta) an initiative for CARICOM member states to stimulate and share the cultural expression from folklore and visual arts to culinary and fashion. Suriname has hosted this event in 2003 and 2013.

World Day of Prayer Committee of Suriname

The ecumenical collaboration was established in Suriname in November 1942 under the name Committee of Christian Churches (CCK). The Women's World Day of Prayer started in the year 1953. In February 1954, a board was officially appointed, consisting of Mrs. J. Oostburg-Cop (Moravian Church) and Mrs. Görges-de Vries (Lutheran Church) and the wives of Rev Paap and Rev De Groot of the Dutch Reformed Church. The following denominations and organizations were in the committee: YWCA, Moravian Church, the Salvation Army, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Adventist Church, Methodists, Wesleyan Church, AMEC, Bromet Church (Baptists), Roman Catholic Church, Pilgrim Holiness Mission and Calvinists. Following the resignation of some of the members of the aforementioned board, the following members joined namely Mrs. I. Goede-Bolwerk (Lutheran), Mrs. C. Darnoud and E. Ritfeld-Seedorf (Moravian) and Mrs. C. Oosterling (Bromet Church).

Mrs I. Goede-Bolwerk was the secretary and became chairperson in 1969 holding this position for 32 years. A new board was appointed in 1996, with E. Berghout (Roman Catholic) as chairperson and D. Pengel (Moravian Church) as secretary. From 2007 until today, D. Pengel has been chairperson/liaison. The other members of the board are: R. Pindon, 1st secretary (Moravian Church), W. Riedewald (Roman Catholic), treasurer, M. Seymonson-Niekoop, supervisory board member (Salvation Army), W. Lieuw Fat-Simons, 2nd secretary (Reformed) and H. Reid, 2nd treasurer (Lutheran). The unexpected passing of the board members E. Leter and F. Jie was devastating to us and we will remember them with love. Since December 2000 we have established a direct relationship with WDPIC. In September 2003 two of our board members participated in the Quadrennial Meeting in Swanwick (England) and since then the board had attended WDPIC conferences.

WDP services were initially held only in the 'Grote Stadskerk' (Moravian 'Mother Church') and the Roman Catholic Cathedral. After the military coup and the subsequent political events, attendance to the services increased maybe for a need of community support and comfort during a hard time.

Services were celebrated in Paramaribo, and also in the districts of Wanica, Commewijne, Para, Nickerie, Saramacca, Marowijne, Coronie and Brokopondo. In the past, the liturgies booklets were shipped from the Netherlands and multiplied locally. In the 1970s we received children's liturgies. As of that time, Brother Carl Breeveld has provided the youth services.

The offering has been used locally for missionary work of the churches, a community center, and communities in the interior, and also sent to the writer country. The donations could only be given after approval by the board by written request.

On November 2014, a Strengthening National Committee workshop was held to start the writing process with the support of World Day of Prayer International Committee (WDPIC). The focus of the workshop was to understand the theme according to the environmental context of Suriname. The sessions facilitated by T. Lieuw (UNDP director), H. Berrenstein (Conservation Biologist) and M. Artist (cultural anthropologist) gave us a great background.

WDPIC officers, R. Oliveira (Executive Director) and M. Fortin (regional representative) facilitated the conversation about styles of leadership, being a writer country and the organization of WDP both on a national and an international level.

The Preparatory Workshop for a writer country held on April 2015 with around 35 women and young women provided a writing training and opportunity to organize the writer working groups. It was our pleasure to welcome R. Oliveira, P. Balasundaram and C. Harbig as leaders of the workshop. We left the workshop full of enthusiasm and well-equipped to start out our task.

We thank the Lord for the dedication of these women in writing the materials for the 2018 program, which we did with the assistance of experts and female pastors.

From 1953 till now every year on the first Friday in March men and women congregate from the various districts in our nation, to pray for a specific country. Services are also held in elderly homes and a prison. Children's services are held on the Sunday following the adult service. In total there are 20 locations for adult services and 5 for children's services.

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