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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 12 June 1990 from the Permanent Representative of
Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Guyana, in response to international concern over the environmental degradation of our planet, in particular as expressed by the Heads of Government at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference at Kuala Lumpur, has identified nearly one million acres of tropical rain forest for a Joint Government of Guyana/Commonwealth Secretariat Tropical Rain Forest Project.

The project, which is intended to promote the study of sustainable forest utilization and the maintenance of biological diversity, was officially launched on 5 June 1990 - World Environment Day - by His Excellency Hugh Desmond Hoyte, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath Ramphal.

The joint press release that was issued on that occasion is annexed herewith for your information.

I would ask that you be good enough to arrange the circulation of the present letter and its annex as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 83 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) S. R. INSANALLY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Joint press release issued by Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretariat on the occasion of World Environment Day

Guyana offers nearly one million acres for sustainable tropical forestry

A Commonwealth Group of Experts, after completing a mission to Guyana, has proposed a joint Commonwealth-Government of Guyana programme to manage a large area of the country's Amazonian forest in an ecologically sustainable manner for the benefit of the international community. The Government of Guyana has generously offered 900,000 acres of pristine tropical forest for this purpose. If implemented, the programme has the potential to become the largest ecological research and development project carried out in one of the richest centres of biological diversity in the world. The main part of the Group's report is being released today to coincide with the world's observance of Environment Day.

Background

At their last meeting, in Malaysia in October 1989, Commonwealth Heads of Government adopted the Langkawi Declaration on Environment, a programme of action to counter several global environmental threats. President Hoyte of Guyana, a small developing country, which, like many others, is particularly threatened by the consequences of environmental problems (notably, global warming) caused mainly by the richer nations, gave the programme a vigorous, practical start. He magnanimously offered to set aside a significant part of his country's Amazonian forest for a pioneering project, under Commonwealth auspices, to demonstrate methods of sustainable management of tropical forests and of conserving biological diversity for the benefit of the whole international community. The area involved is large in relation to the country's size and the extent of its virgin forests. His offer was particularly significant because Guyana's forests have been only lightly exploited; it is one of just 13 countries in the world where the bulk of tropical forests is still conserved. Commonwealth leaders asked the Commonwealth Secretary-General to organize a high-level group of experts to undertake an exploratory mission to pursue his offer. The Group, a distinguished multi-disciplinary team of Commonwealth experts led by the eminent Indian scientist Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, visited Guyana from 12 to 22 May 1990. Their recommendations are based on a site description report prepared by a Guyanese Inter-agency Committee led by Mr. Winston King, assisted by a counterpart technical team, and by an advance party to the Commonwealth Expert Group.

The Group's proposals

The Group of Experts recommends a programme for sustainable tropical forestry that would have the following components:

(a) The establishment of a wilderness preserve to maintain an earmarked area of the forest in its pristine purity. This will provide opportunities for scientists and scholars from all over the world to study nature in action and to unravel the richness of the evolutionary mechanisms in a tropical rain forest.

(b) The maintenance and management of a part of the forest to yield economic benefits to Guyana (in the form of forest products, medicinal and industrial raw materials, mining and eco-tourism) on an ecologically sustainable basis.

(c) The establishment of an international centre for research, training and communication on the sustainable management of tropical rain forests (which would be central to the programme).

(d) The promotion of environmental literacy (through formal and non-formal means), particularly on the symbiotic links between forest and the quality of life on Earth.

According to the experts, the rational management of these forests will ensure that the biological "capital" they embody will produce sufficient "interest" in the form of economic and ecological benefits to all people. Subject to further study, they tentatively estimate it would cost 200,000 United States dollars to launch the programme, and \$45 million to support its first five-year work programme (\$3 million in the first year of its operation).

Follow-up

The Group's detailed recommendations for the programme's implementation are far-reaching in character, calling for action at national, regional and international levels. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Guyana will be co-ordinating follow-up action on the report's recommendations, several of which should be of great interest to the wider international community, as it desperately searches for ways of restoring global ecological balance. Consultations will be held with major donor Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to seek their support for the programme.

In the words of the experts, the programme they have proposed "would help to initiate a new chapter in the ecological and economic history of Guyana and other countries endowed with tropical rain forests", offering "a unique opportunity for Commonwealth and international co-operation in an area of supreme relevance to the future of the quality of life on our planet". Much has been said about the over-exploitation of tropical forests. A small developing country has taken a bold, imaginative step in earnest of its commitment to play its part to protect the world's environment from further destruction. It is now for the international community to ensure support for this very innovative and exciting project.

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