

Dear MCNer's,

I am writing to you as people who love justice. You know that I spent time in Bangladesh with MCC, but what is less well known is that prior to that, when I lived in Seattle, I was involved with some friends, Dan Peplow and Sarah Augustine, who have been working with indigenous peoples in Suriname (see map below) to advocate for fundamental human rights and economic justice for the past 12 years. Their program is called the [Suriname Indigenous Health Fund](#), and there is lots more information at the link.

(You might have heard Sarah Augustine's name because out of this work in Suriname grew a movement for churches of the world to recognize our (the church's) direct complicity in the oppression and colonization of indigenous brothers and sisters, calling to repudiate the so-called 'Doctrine of Discovery'.)

I am writing to you with regards to the most recent activity in relation to Suriname. One of the ways rights are withheld from indigenous peoples in Suriname (like many other places) happens when traditional lands or mineral rights are sold or given as concessions in exchange for economic development grants and loans from multi-lateral development banks (specifically the Inter-American Development Bank in this case).

Suriname is only one instance of economic development occurring at the expense of indigenous peoples. We are specifically reaching out on behalf of the Wayana of Suriname, whose tribal lands are contaminated by mining, and the Miskito, indigenous peoples in Nicaragua, whose tribal lands have been violently taken for resettlement and development.

The biggest funder of the IDB is the US Treasury, which is funded by appropriations of the US Senate, which ostensibly represents us. And so, we are reaching out to Senators to 1) raise awareness of this issue and 2) request their signatures on a letter from the Senate (originating in Sen. Maria Cantwell's office) to the US Treasury requesting that they hold the IDB accountable to its own human rights policy.

That letter is ready to be released this Friday/early next week, and it is helpful if Senators hear about it from their constituents before they are approached by staff from Sen. Cantwell's office. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, it would be particularly valuable to have his signature. SO, I have scheduled a meeting with Senator Dick Durbin's staff in Springfield for tomorrow, Thursday, 12 May at 2:30 PM, to ask for that.

I am extending an invitation to anyone from the Peace & Justice Committee, and anyone from Mennonite Church of Normal to come along for the meeting, and to join me in this advocacy journey, wherever it takes us. The more noise we make, the more likely our Senators are to listen.

In the links below are more details about the specific impacts of this economic development in Suriname. The attached documents also include more about SIHF's work to date, what we're asking, and background on the Miskito indigenous peoples of Nicaragua, who have also requested this action on their behalf.

Anyone interested can contact me at: Meghan Reha/309-807-7288
mereha@gmail.com

Thank you in advance!

Meghan Reha

Links:

[Indigenous Suriname \(25 min\)](#)

[Dan Rather Reports: The True Cost of Gold](#)

