



The Belem Declaration – an Opportunity for Guyana

Recently, eight countries that are home to the Amazon: Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela and three other tropical forest rich countries, Indonesia, The Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo met in Belem at the invitation of Brazil's President Lula, to consider actions that are required to arrest the present rate of destruction of this critical global ecosystem. The Amazonian countries met as a group on the first day of the two day meeting, to consider an Amazonian action program to stem the tide of Amazonian deforestation and degradation. The other three countries joined the meeting on the second day.

At the end of the meeting countries issued the Belem Declaration, which essentially is a call for action to arrest the degradation of global tropical forest ecosystems and to maintain access to the essential services they provide, through the employment of sustainable development practices. Areas highlighted for action are in climate change, monitoring and cooperation in water resources management , protection of forests, Amazonian coastal areas, vulnerable ecosystems and biodiversity and it emphasised the importance of Indigenous rights and protection. It also called for the establishment of a science body to meet annually and produce authoritative reports on science related to the Amazon rainforest, performing a role similar to that of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The declaration calls for action in several areas critical for tropical forest survival and offers a roadmap for Amazonian countries to rein in deforestation and promote the sustainable development of the Amazon. It calls for major efforts to provide the knowledge base to inform action on the latter, through scientific research, education and innovation, utilising a strengthened network of institutions in the Amazon basin. This is to be accomplished through promoting " the development of strategies, programs and projects for the developing and strengthening of science, technology and innovation in the Amazon region in the scope of research and innovation policies geared towards the conservation and recognition of the intrinsic value of biodiversity; sustainable use of fauna and flora, and territory; to the promotion of the human right to food; energy transition;



health sovereignty; and science for peace and development, among others”. It proposes action for the development of a “strategic agenda for the integrated development of production based on the sustainable use of biodiversity resources in Amazon countries and encouraging the renovation, expansion and consolidation of scientific and technological research infrastructures in the Amazon region, as well as to stimulate graduate courses in topics related to the Amazon region and international cooperation programs for their integration and use by researchers from States”.

. Under climate change, actions to develop common negotiating positions for climate summits and to address issues on climate finance, including mechanisms to advance innovative mechanisms for financing climate action, which could include debt-for-climate action swaps by developed countries are proposed.


Actions to address cooperation in water resources management include the establishment of a network of Water authorities of Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO) States Parties for cooperation in the sustainable management of regional water resources and to “strengthen cooperation and harmonization of monitoring and hydrometeorological warning systems of States Parties for an effective exchange of experience, information and knowledge, and improvement of monitoring capacities through strengthening of national monitoring networks; for generation of warnings of risks and threats to the environment and human health, disasters and extreme events of hydrometeorological nature”. Consideration is given to the pursuit of “joint technical-scientific studies and research, focusing on the exposure to mercury and other hazardous substance from mining activities/small-scale and large-scale mining, in particular those that affect indigenous peoples and local and traditional communities, and to carry out prevention and remediation activities and to strengthen regional and international cooperation for the fight against illegal mining, illegal trade, and other related crimes.”

Actions called for under the Belem Declaration mirror those that are articulated in Guyana’s Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and some of these are already being addressed as Guyana embarks on implementation of its LCDS. Guyana has long been committed to the concept of the conservation and sustainable management and



utilisation of its forest resources and has been addressing this issue through the Iwokrama Centre for Rainforest Development and Conservation, which was established in 1996 and has at its disposal 3,716 square kilometres (1,435 sq mi) hectares of virgin tropical forest. Iwokrama's mandate is to "promote the conservation and the sustainable and equitable use of tropical rainforests in a manner which will lead to lasting ecological, economic and social benefits to the people of Guyana and to the world in general". Indeed, Iwokrama's mandate embraces some of the intended outcomes of the action programme delineated in the Belem Declaration and its activities to date, are in keeping with those now being proposed in the Declaration. As an example, Iwokrama has achieved international certification of its forest management practices and operations by the Forest Stewardship Council™ (FSC™). FSC™ certified forests are forests managed with consideration for people, the natural environment and wildlife. Further, Iwokrama has for some time been involved in several scientific studies that are being carried out in the Guyana Shield with some emphasis on biodiversity.

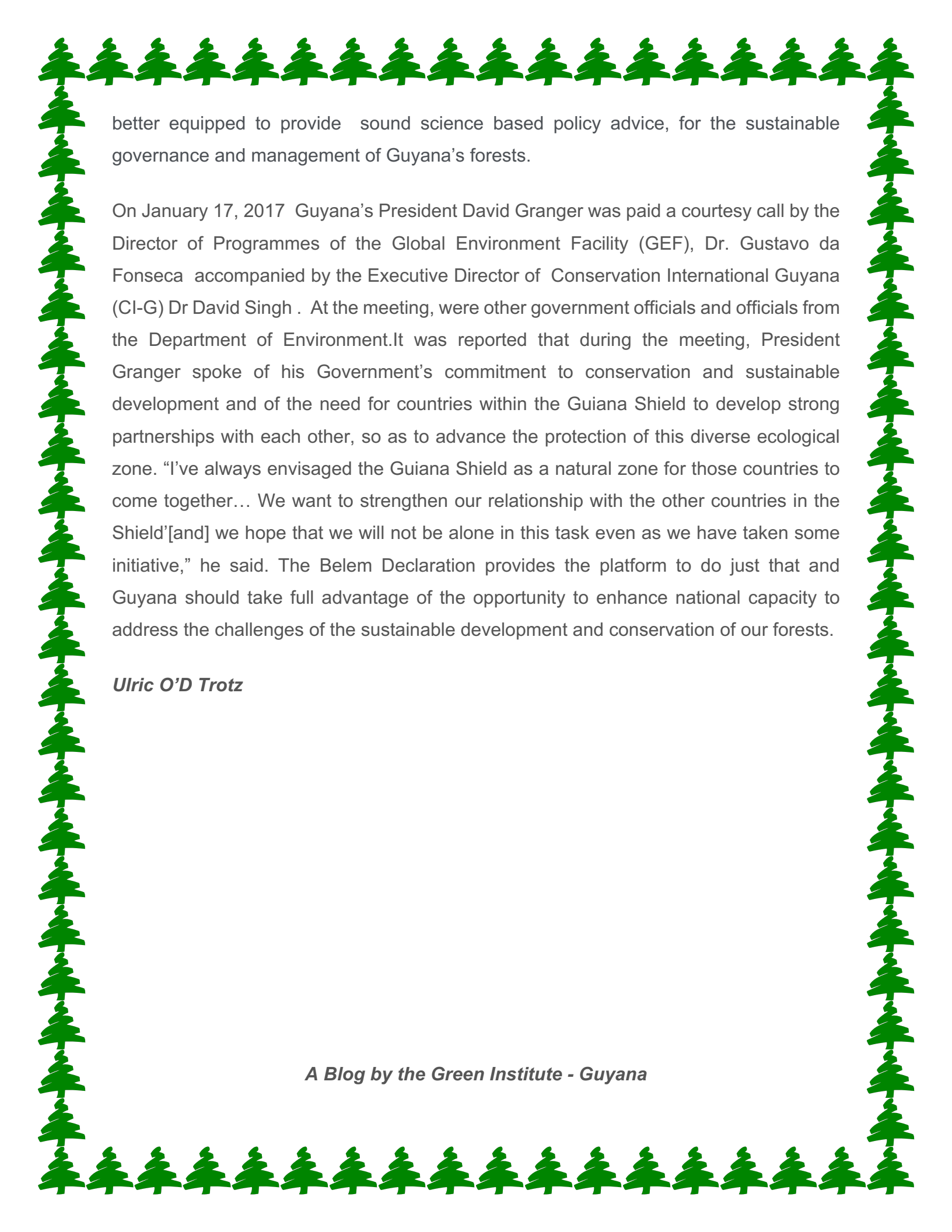
Guyana should use the opportunities for collaboration and institutional strengthening being proposed under the Declaration, to enhance the many initiatives now underway locally to build a climate resilient and low carbon economy. The University of Guyana and Iwokrama should be at the forefront of this collaborative effort to address the wide ranging scientific research agenda that the Declaration proposes to undertake. Guyana's forest estate is part of the unique Guyana shield extending through Venezuela, Colombia, Suriname and Brazil and French Guyana and representing one of the world's most pristine rainforest landscapes, that stores roughly 18 percent of the world's tropical forest carbon and 20 percent of the world's fresh water and with great potential for ground breaking research e.g carbon sequestration in mixed tropical forests, biodiversity characterisation, conservation and utilisation. The latter falls in the province of Guyana's Biodiversity Research Centre at the University of Guyana which serves the nation in the facilitation of biodiversity research and the promotion of biodiversity conservation and management. The Centre should extend its activities to encompass research on the utilisation of biodiversity (agrobiodiversity, medicinal plants and non-timber forest products). As part of this effort, Guyana should also embark on the establishment of in

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situ conservation sites (local botanical gardens) for both agrobiodiversity and medicinal plants, especially those identified through knowledge derived from our indigenous population. This should be accompanied by a system that firmly establishes the intellectual property rights for the material and protocols for access to these resources by interested parties. Such an endeavour can be assigned to the University, Iwokrama and the Bina Institute.

Other institutions in Guyana should be involved in the network of institutions that have a role to play and to benefit from the networking for the purpose of implementing the different aspects of the Declaration – the Guyana Water Authority for water resources management, the Guyana and Meteorological Department to enhance its capacity for hydrometeorological monitoring in Guyana’s interior and to improve the accuracy of their forecasts and early warning systems, the National Agricultural Research and Environmental Institute (NAREI) for activities related to developing sustainable agricultural systems in the Amazon, the climate change office to be part of the climate change response and advocacy programme, and relevant civil society organisations, especially those representing Guyana’s indigenous population.

The Belem Declaration provides Guyana with an opportunity to benefit from the coordinated action among Amazonian States to address the multiple challenges faced in ensuring that our forests continue to provide critical ecosystem services and that they are managed in a manner that ensures that these services will be available for generations to follow. It also provides a platform for the further development of our institutional capacity to provide a sound knowledge base for policy making for the conservation and sustainable use of Guyana’s forest estate. Given the unique and unexplored character of latter, being as it is part of the Guyana Shield, opportunities abound for groundbreaking research that can lead to unknown benefits for its inhabitants and the global community. Guyana should grasp the opportunity to be a major player in the evolution of a community of practice that safeguards and nurtures its vast forestry estate for the benefit of the peoples of the Amazon rain forest and beyond. The action program of the Belem Declaration opens the way for the relevant Guyanese institutions to establish strategic partnerships with key Amazonian Institutions and through their collaborative effort, to be



better equipped to provide sound science based policy advice, for the sustainable governance and management of Guyana's forests.

On January 17, 2017 Guyana's President David Granger was paid a courtesy call by the Director of Programmes of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Dr. Gustavo da Fonseca accompanied by the Executive Director of Conservation International Guyana (CI-G) Dr David Singh . At the meeting, were other government officials and officials from the Department of Environment. It was reported that during the meeting, President Granger spoke of his Government's commitment to conservation and sustainable development and of the need for countries within the Guiana Shield to develop strong partnerships with each other, so as to advance the protection of this diverse ecological zone. "I've always envisaged the Guiana Shield as a natural zone for those countries to come together... We want to strengthen our relationship with the other countries in the Shield'[and] we hope that we will not be alone in this task even as we have taken some initiative," he said. The Belem Declaration provides the platform to do just that and Guyana should take full advantage of the opportunity to enhance national capacity to address the challenges of the sustainable development and conservation of our forests.

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A Blog by the Green Institute - Guyana