

Statement Delivered by Mr. Deon Dick (Ras Khafra)  
General Secretary of the Guyana Rastafari Council  
3rd Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent  
Thematic Panel: Culture and Recognition  
18th April, 2024

2 mins

Thank you Honourable Chairperson,

distinguished delegates,

Under this thematic area I'll posit two issues but expand on one.

The first issue is the Intellectual Property Rights of Rastafari Culture for which I will submit a presentation on behalf of the Rastafari Millennium Council of Jamaica.

On the second issue. In October 2017 the United Nations Working Group of Experts visited Guyana to carry out an investigation on the state of Africans living there. Among the findings reported was that members of the Rastafari community were experiencing discrimination based on their religion and culture and recommended to the government that requisite laws be changed to protect them.

In 2018 the Caricom's Marijuana Commission's report stated explicitly that the legal regime that criminalizes the use of Cannabis especially for religious and cultural purposes by the Rastafari community is a violation of human rights.

Whilst a few Caribbean countries since then have heeded the recommendation of the Marijuana Commission, many have not. In Guyana, despite those recommendations, the government recently amended the Narcotic Act but failed to put in place provisions to recognize and protect the rights of the Rastafari community.

Consequently, members of the Rastafari community are still being harassed by the police for possession of small amounts of Cannabis. Just last year videos were circulated on social media of a police officer kneeling on the neck of a Rastafari brother, in a manner reminiscent of George Floyd, because he was found in possession of Cannabis and refused to pay the police.

The matter was reported to the Ethnic Relations Commission and the investigative unit of the commission went in search of the brother. When he was found by the investigative officers he told them that he was afraid for his life and did not wish to pursue the matter. This is just one of many similar examples that time would not permit me to give.

In closing, the Rastafari community, like the other Afrocentric organizations, has been trying to meet with the President of Guyana for the last four years to discuss our concerns but all attempts have been unsuccessful.

The Rastafari community of Guyana is requesting a statement from this forum calling on the Government of Guyana to recognize and respect the rights of Rastafari in Guyana.

I thank you.