

**Twenty-fifth session  
Nairobi, 5–12 May 2009**

---

**Item 17 of the provisional agenda**

**Activities relating to the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of  
Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names**

## **Activities of Suriname Relating to the Agenda Item 17 \***

---

\* Prepared by Hein Raghoobar (Suriname).

## **Index**

- 1 The Provisional Agenda 17 of Suriname
2. Map functions
  - 2.1 Location and image of Suriname
  - 2.2 The economy of Suriname
  - 2.3 The cultural diversity of Suriname
3. The cartographic history of Suriname
  - 3.1 The approach of the concept place in Suriname
    - 3.1.1. Descriptive or ideographic sense of place
    - 3.1.2. Social construct of place
    - 3.1.3. Phenomenological sense of place
4. Ethnonym of Suriname
  - 4.1 Autonyms of ethnic groups
  - 4.2 Esconyms of ethnic groups
5. Toponymy of Suriname
  - 5.1 Suriname and the Guyana Shield
  - 5.2. The Country name Suriname
  - 5.3 The town Paramaribo
6. Regionalisation
  - 6.1 Regionalisation of Suriname's territory
  - 6.2 The region of the plantations
  - 6.3 Region Central Suriname Nature Reserve (C.S.N.R.)
7. Toponyms division of natural features
  - 7.1 Names of places to local characteristics
  - 7.2 Toponyms derived from important events
  - 7.3 Toponyms of hills and peaks
  - 7.4 Toponyms derived from European discovery and conquest
  - 7.5 Toponyms derived from other cases

## Suriname, Paramaribo 16 March 2009



[Flag](#)



[Coat of arms](#)

### Republic of Suriname

#### *Republiek Suriname*

### 1. Provisional agenda 17 of Suriname

The government of Suriname appreciates it that she is permitted to participate in the conference of the United Nations Groups of Experts in Geographical Names. For this conference Mr. Hein Raghhoobar M.Sc. is delegated to participate in the working group of the provisional agenda and in particular in support of Agenda 17: **Activities: Relating to the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names.**

This report focuses on:

- The function of the map of Suriname on national and international level.
- Geographical representation of Suriname in relation to the topographical analysis.
- The topography and ethnonyms (exonyms and autonyms) objects (symbols) on the map of Suriname.
- Identification of the objects of ethnic groups with heritage objects on the map of Suriname.

### 2. Map functions

Maps are macro scopes which are used primarily to represent spatial phenomena across the earth's surface. In general maps have four functions:

- The cognitive function.
- The communication function.
- The decision function.
- The social function.

The map of Suriname functions as a pole, learning and assisting tool in the education, tourism, mass media communications, administrative logistics services and cultural activities. An important aspect is the geographical representation of Suriname on national and international level.

#### 2.1 Location and image of Suriname

Suriname (Sranan), officially the Republic of Suriname is the smallest country located in terms of area (163.800 km<sup>2</sup>) and population (493.000) in the north coast of South-America at 2-6° N.B. and 54-58 ° W.L. The country was formerly known as “Nederlands Guyana” (Dutch Guyana) and became independent in 1975 on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November. Suriname is situated

between French Guyana to the east and the Republic of Guyana to the west. The southern border is shared with Brazil and the northern border is the Atlantic coast.( figure 1).



Figure .1.Map of Suriname.

The Southern border with French Guyana is disputed along the Marowini and Litani River, while the southern west border (Boven Corantijn and the Coeroeni) is disputed by Guyana. The north-west maritime boundary with Guyana was arbitrated by the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea on September 20, 2007.

Situated on the Guiana Shield, the country can be divided into two main geographical regions. The northern, lowland coastal area (roughly above the line Albina-Paranam-Wageningen) has been cultivated, and most of the population lives there. The southern part consists of tropical rainforest and sparsely inhabited (Maroons and Amerindians) savanna along the border with Brazil, covering about 80 % of Suriname’s land surface.

## 2.2 The economy of Suriname

The economy of Suriname is dominated by the bauxite industry, which accounts for more than 15% of G.D.P. and 70% of export earnings. Bauxite mining continues to be a strong revenue, but the discovery and exploitation of oil and gold has added substantially to Suriname’s economic growth. Agriculture, especially of rice, fish,shrimp and bananas, remains a strong component of

the economy, and ecotourism is providing new economic opportunities. The currency is the Surinamese dollar (S.R.D.).

### **2.3 The culture diversity of Suriname**

Culture differs from each other. When we look at the population of Suriname, we see a mosaic of culture. Suriname is according to the U.N.E.S.C.O. an example of a state with so many ethnical groups that live in harmony with each other. There are 17 ethnical groups and 22 mother tongues (dialects) spoken in Suriname. Dutch is the official language. English is widely spoken; the common language is Sranan Tongo. What all ethnic groups have in common with each other is the Universal Standard in his mental programming.

Just as the nature needs a variety of animals and plants to maintain its ecosystem, so the ethnical groups need a variety of culture forms to maintain the Suriname's society.

The heterogenic Surinamese population is accomplished by diaspora's of:

- White colonization in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from Holland (Hollandse boeren, a minority group).
- The descendants of slavery in Africa, Maroons make up 10% of the population.
- The Surinamese Creoles are the descendants of West-African Slaves and Europeans (mostly Dutch); make up 31 % of the population.
- The contract labors from India (Hindustani) make up 37% of the population and Indonesia (Javanese) make up 15 % of the population.
- Immigrants of the Jews, Chinese, Guyanese and Brazilians are the minority groups of the Surinamese population.

The Creole, Hindustani and Javanese are the dominant ethnic (culture) groups. The ethnic groups are hardly ever assimilated in culture, political and social level. Religious and ethnical dividing lines almost run parallel. All ethnic groups identify themselves with the Surinamese territory through their historical tangible heritage toponomic object on the map of Suriname.

As result, we must understand and admit the role of the cultural diversity of Suriname to make sure that it is good for the present and future generations. Spatial differentiation takes place through the culture and culture diversity gives shape to how we live, the place that we create, how we share it and how we interpret the world around us.

### **3. The cartographic history of Suriname**

After the discovery of Suriname late 15<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent colonization by Spanish, British and Dutch, there was an Europeanization of natural and cultural phenomena within the Surinamese territory. Historical archives show that pioneers surveyors from Europe ,mainly from the Netherlands between the 16th and 20th century, have laid the foundation for the mapping of geological, ecological, geomorphologic and cultural objects and artifacts of Surinamese territory. Colonial military punitive expeditions, surveyor's expeditions and scientific expeditions of the Dutch Royal Geographical Society had the task:

1. To map the country with regard to mountains, hills , rivers and watershed.
2. To investigate the reliëf (landscapes) of Suriname.
3. To research on the soil of Suriname.
4. To research on the ecosystem of the tropical rain forest and wetlands of the coastal area.
5. To examine and mapping the tribal society, the Maroons (descendants of African slaves) and the Indigenous (Amerindians). In this investigation the Dutch and English settlers identify themselves with the Surinamese territory for the naming of places, mountains,

hills, waterfalls and plantations. There are different definitions of naming a place. Primarily there is a distinction in:

- Natural features of a place (hills, stream, landscape).
- Place names of human settlement.

How exactly a place is defined and what the exact concept of a place is, varies from country to country.

### **3.1 The approach of the concept place in Suriname**

A place is a way of understanding, seeing and knowing the world. A place on the map of Suriname has three fundamental aspects:

1. **Location:** it is a location on the earth's surface
2. **Local:** material settings for social relations, the actual shape of a place where people conduct their lives.
3. **Sense of place:** subjective and emotional attachment that people have for places. Sites disseminate collective memories that can be emotional and cultural (ethnic) symbols. This meaning is a central part of the identity of ethnic groups that they experience and it creates a bond with the place (place attachment). Places are decorated by human activities. The result is the formation of spatial patterns in places that are determined by temporal change of households, businesses and institutions. Places are socially constructed and have over time (historically) different meanings by different cultures. For example, the tropical rainforest of Suriname is socially constructed as follows:

- Physical geographer: a typical vegetation of the tropical rainy climate.
- Ecologist and biologists: rich in biodiversity (ecosystems).
- Environmental scientists: the green lungs of the earth.
- Anthropologists: habitat of tribal society (Maroons and Amerindian Indians).

Through the history of the idea of the place it is possible to see three levels at which places are located on the maps of Suriname.

#### **3.1.1. Descriptive or ideographic sense of place**

First, a descriptive or ideographic approach to a place is the meaning of a place as a unique and particular entity. The concern here is with the distinctiveness and particularity of places, say the Maroon and the Amerindian villages in the hinter land of Suriname.

#### **3.1.2. Social construct of place**

The second level is a social constructionist approach to a place. This approach is still interested in the particularity of places, but only as instances of more general underlying social processes (say the International Airport J.Pengel), the town Paramaribo and place in the coast line.

#### **3.1.3. Phenomenological sense of place**

The third level is the phenomenological approach of place: this seeks to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessary and important in places of Suriname. In this sense space interaction between capital city and places in the hinterland provide for food and energy production for the population.

## **4. Ethnonym of Suriname**

Ethnonym is the name applied to an ethnic group. Ethnonyms can be divided into two categories:

1. Autonyms
2. Exonyms

#### **4.1 Autonyms of ethnic groups**

The name of the ethnic group is created and used by the diaspora ethnic group in Suriname itself.

1. The Jews, the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews descendants in Suriname.
2. The Surinamese Maroons (original Portuguese): descendants of escaped West-African slaves divided into five main groups: Aucans, Kwintie, Matawai, Sramaccans and Paramaccans
3. The Javanese: descendants in Suriname of contract workers from the former Dutch East Indies on island of Indonesia (Java, Boneo, Sumatra).
4. The Hindustani: descendants of 19/20<sup>th</sup> century contract workers from India.
5. The Chinese: descendants of 19<sup>th</sup> century labor migrations from China.
6. Other ethnic minorities are: Lebanese, Guyanese and Brazilians.

#### **4.2 Exonyms of ethnic groups**

Exonyms: the name of the ethnic group has been created by another group of people.

Examples of Exonyms in the multi-ethnic populations of Suriname:

1. Indiaan (Indigenous of Amerindians) or Inheemsen is a given name after the discovery of the new world by Columbus. The main group is divided in: Arowakken, Caraiben, Trio's Wajana's, Akuriyo and Kalina.
2. Creool: means white ethnic group born in West-Indie also descendants of West-African slaves and Dutch born in West-Indie.
3. Boeroe: derived from boer, the Dutch word for farmer or descendants of Dutch 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrant farmers.

### **5. Toponymy of Suriname**

The origin of place names in Suriname is the result of a complex interplay of historical factors, political policy, spatial interaction and handling relationships (between households, businesses and institutions). Most of the names are derived from the indigenous (Amerindians Minority) en the Maroon minority.

#### **The origin, the meaning and the toponymy of place names into Suriname.**

##### **5.1 Suriname and the Guyana Shield**

The word "Guyana" is believed to mean "land of many waters", a fitting description for this region of northern South America that is essentially an island of land, bounded by the waters of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to the north and east, the Rio Orinero to the west and the Rio Negro and the Rio Amazonas to the south. This large area, which includes all of Guyana, Suriname, and French Guyana, as well as parts of Columbia, Venezuela and Brazil, is the largest expanse of undisturbed tropical rain forest in the world.

##### **5.2. The Country name Suriname**

Country name of Suriname is of Indigenous (Amerindians) origin. The name was derived from the Amerindians tribal "Surinen" location on the Suriname River.

### 5.3 The town Paramaribo

The town Paramaribo originated in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It probably owes its name to the “**Paramaru**” (Sommelsdijkse Creek) or “**Permurbo**” Caraiben (Amerindian) village on the Suriname River ( named by the English in 1650). Paramaribo was named “**Nieuw Middelburg**” in 1667 by the Zeeuwen (Netherland) but it was not the first capital. That was **Thorarica**, located 25 km from Paramaribo on the Suriname River. The name was derived from the Arowakan (indigenous) name “torara-hariraka” (place of residence of the white men) or from the Jewish words ”**thora**” ( saint leathers) and “rika” (wealthy).

## 6. Regionalisation

### 6.1 Regionalisation of Suriname’s territory

The first regionalisation of Suriname’s territory started in 1927. The country was divided in 7 districts : Paramaribo, Nickerie, Coronie, Saramacca, Suriname , Commewijne and Marowijne. Most of the names are derived from the Amerindian minority.

In 1966 there was a reclassification of the districts by the opening of roads in the hinterland, bauxite exploitation and the construction of the Affobaka Hydro-electric Power Centre. There were two new districts (Para en Brokopondo). In 1985, the criteria: accessibility, made most districts (in the coastal plain) become smaller. The sparsely populated southern region was the (largest) tenth district, Sipaliwinie. The word “Sipaliwinie” is derived from the Amerindian word "Sipa" (stone, rock) and "Winie (water or river).

### 6.2 The region of the plantations

In 1667 Suriname was conquered by the Netherlands from the British. Suriname was a plantation colony. Along the rivers in the north and west approximately 600 plantations were built for the production of coffee, cotton, sugar and cocoa for the European market. The plantations were named after the name of the plantation owners or a place in Holland (figure 2). Many names of the plantations remain through the centuries in the cultural landscape and are subdivided into:

1. Dutch plantation names particularly in the district Commewijne example :Marienburg, Frederick Town, Peter Care, Suzanna’s Daal, Alkmaar, Kronenburg ,Stootwijk etc.
2. Scottish names in the plantation districts Coronie and Nickerie: Clyde, Mary's Hope, Hamilton, Paradise, Waldeck, and Hampton Court etc.



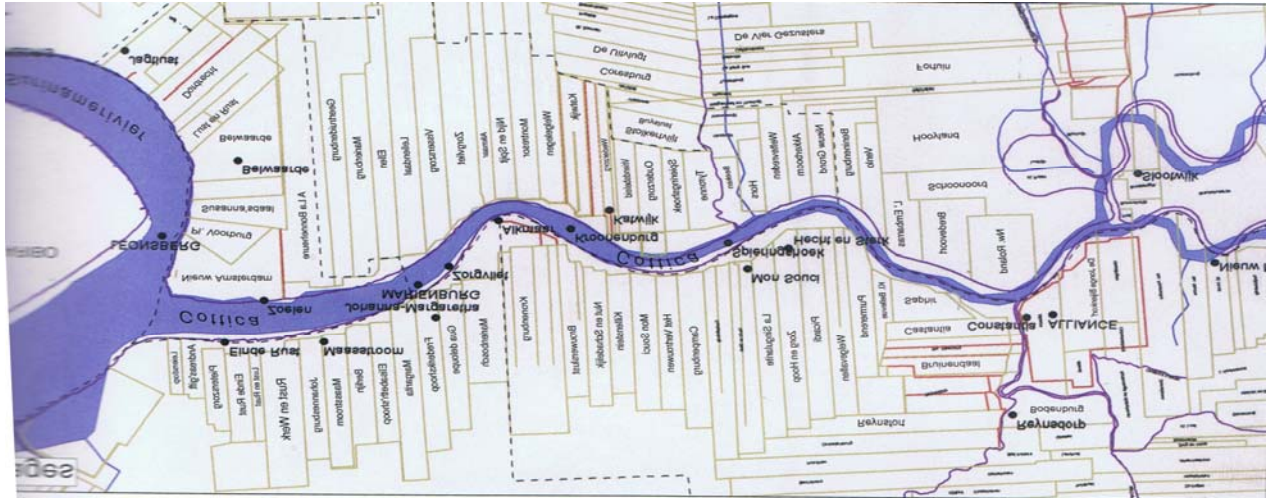


Figure 2. Map of the plantations on the Cottica and Commewijne river.

**6.3 Region Central Suriname Nature Reserve (C.S.N.R.)**

The C.S.N.R. comprises 1, 6 million acres primarily tropical forest of west-central Suriname. The reserve protects the upper watershed of the Coppename River, and covers a range of topography and ecosystems (rich biodiversity). On 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 the U.N.E.S.C.O. World Heritage Committee in Sedney, Australia decided to inscribe the Central Suriname Nature Reserve on the World Heritage List of Natural Sites. The reserve became one of the most pristine nature reserves on the World Heritage List. (figure 3 )



Figure 3. Map of Suriname (Location of the Central Suriname Nature Reserve.).

## 7. Toponymy division of natural features

### 7.1 Names of places to local (nature) characteristics.

1. **Location “Blauwgrond” (Blue grond)** a place in the north of Paramaribo. The origin of the name comes from the indigo blue color of a tree from Indonesia. With the leaves the local people made a bluing( color) for laundry and was also used as a medicinal plant.
2. **Location Cola kreek (Cola Creek).** Cola Creek is a recreational resort in the district of Para 50 km from Paramaribo. Because of the decomposition of leaves and branches (humus) in the water, the water is black, same as the soft drink Coca Cola.
3. **Location Tafelberg (Table hill).** It is 800m high and is located in the centre of Central Suriname Nature Reserve. It is the only Roraima sandstone mountain with a flat surface (plateau) measurement of 12,500 hectares.
4. **Location Drie Tabiki (Three islands).** Drie Tabiki is a Maroon given name to a three grouped island on the Tapanahony River.
5. **Location Tepu.** Tepu means high, and it is a tribal village of the Amerindian’s on the Tepu Hill.
6. **Location Nickerie.** The name of the district Nickerie is derived from the fruit Awara on the Nickerie River by the Arowaakse Amerindians.
7. **Location Moengo.** Moengo means hills for the Maroon.
8. **Location Santigron (Sand ground).** Santigron means sand ground location.
9. **Location Bigiston (Big stone).** Bigiston means big stone’s on the location.
10. **Location Heidoti (Deer ground).** Heidoti means deer ground or a habitat for deer.
11. **Location Guyaba (Guava).** Guyaba means Guava fruit on the location.
12. **Location Maripa Ston (Maripa Stone).** Maripa Ston means the growth of the Maripa ( palm) fruit on the location.

### 7.2 Toponymy derived from important events

Naming of places derived from important events.

1. **Cottica:** the name is derived from an unpleasant event while crossing the Cottica River.
2. **Blanche Marie Falls:** the name is derived from the wife of the District Commissioner of Nickerie who drowned at this waterfall in the Nickerie river.
3. **Pedrosungu Fall:** the name is derived from the Maroon Pedro, who drowned at this waterfall.
4. **Poeloegudu Fall:** it is a location of the waterfall on the Marowijne River, where people often lost their possessions.
5. **Stondansi Falls:** this means fall with dancing stone’s.
6. **Berg en Dal:** Berg en Dal means hills and valleys landscape .

### 7.3 Toponymy of hills and peaks

1. **Hills derived from Dutch Expeditions:** Eileerts de Haanhill, Backhuishill, Stockum hill, Roosevelt peak, Van Asch van Wijk hill, Tonkens hill, Franse Herderschee hill, Browns hill, Lely hill, Goeie hill.
2. **Mountains (Peaks) named after the Dutch Royal Family:** Emmaketen, Wilhelmina hill, Oranje hill, Nassau hill, Hendrik peak, Juliana peak.

3. **Hills derived from Amerindian tribal names :** Toemak Hoemak hills, Acarai hills, Alalapodo, Pelelu Tepu, Apikalo, Kwamalasemoetoe, Palemeu, Kasikasima.

#### **7.4 Toponymy derived from European discovery and conquest**

1. **Raleigh vallen:** Raleigh falls was discovered by Sir.Walter.Raleigh from England on the Coppename river
2. **Stoelmanseiland:** Dutch officer Stoelman conquered the island from the Maroon.
3. **Fort Zeelandia:** conquered by the people of Zeeland from Dutch on the English.

#### **7.5 Toponymy derived from other cases**

1. **Names of Places Derived from Dutch Places:** Amsterdam, Groningen, Alkmaar, Kronenburg, Wageningen, Utrecht, Batavia, Haarlem.
2. **Names of places derived from Maroon ethnic groups:** Kwakoe Gron, Pusugroenoe, Djumu, Loka Loka, Witagron, Pokigron, Godo Olo, Botopasi.
3. **Names of places derived from India:** Calcutta, Bombay.
4. **Names of places of Javanese settlement:** Sidoredjo, Dessa, Tamanredjo, Tambaredjo, Java, Koewarasan.
5. **Names of places of Amerindian minority:** Alalapodu, Pelele Tepu, Kawenhaken, Washabo, Galibi, Apoera, Bigipoika, Palemeu, cupido.
6. **Names of places derived from other countries:** Berlijn, Waterloo, Columbia, Victoria, Hamburg, Benzdorp, L'Esperance, La –Vigelandia, Livorno.

Mr.Hein Raghoobar M.Sc.  
E-mail:h\_raghoobar@hotmail.com