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PRESS RELEASE

Access and Benefit Sharing training completed

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The Justice Institute has just completed an intensive three days of training and discussion for key stakeholders on the importance of conserving biological diversity. The training focussed on granting access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge as well as how to obtain a fair share in the benefits. A key element of the training was to raise awareness of the Nagoya Protocol. This is an international legal instrument which deals with the conservation of biodiversity. It covers access to genetic resources and fair and equitable benefit sharing.

A key outcome of the event was the recommendation from participants that Guyana should accede to the Nagoya Protocol.

Executive Director, Melinda Janki stated, *“Guyana is extremely rich in biodiversity. Conservation of this biodiversity is essential for our future and the future of our children and grandchildren. The Nagoya Protocol is important because it sets standards for access to genetic resources and a fair share in the benefits. It’s not what you have that makes a country rich, but how intelligently you use what you have. We must liberate ourselves from our outdated wasteful consumer culture and develop a modern green economy.”*

The participants in the training came from every region in Guyana and included the Environmental Protection Agency, Guyana Forestry Commission, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, Women and Gender Equality Commission, Rights of the Child Commission, the Guyana representative to the United Nations Permanent

Forum on Indigenous Issues, the University of Guyana, National Trust, Executive Committee of the National Toshias Council, additional toshaos from Region 2 and Region 9, Iwokrama, Guyana Amazon Tropical Birds Society, North Rupununi District Development Board, Conservation International, Sydney Allicock MP, Caricom, teachers and lawyers. Presentations covered the importance of conserving biodiversity, the intrinsic value of biodiversity, traditional knowledge, research, free prior informed consent, and the legal regime. Participants described the event as “well-organised, exciting and encouraging.” Another important outcome of the event was the commitment by participants to work with the EPA in order to develop the right approach in Guyana for access and benefit sharing. The EPA is the lead agency for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol.

Guyana also has a rich heritage of traditional healing, popularly known as “bush medicine” and based on traditional African and Indian medicine. Following the success of this pilot event, the Justice Institute has been asked to conduct more training on access and benefit sharing. The Justice Institute hopes to develop a more comprehensive programme on the Nagoya Protocol that can reach all holders of traditional knowledge. Although Guyana has not yet acceded to the Nagoya Protocol, traditional knowledge holders can still adopt its principles and standards to protect themselves in their dealings with other people.

The level of education varied widely among participants from basic nursery school to university doctorates. The impact of the training was evaluated by a qualified anthropologist. Despite the differences in education levels, the data showed a marked increase across the participants in understanding the issues relating to access and benefit sharing. According to one Amerindian toshao, “I am better able to protect my community from exploitation.” This is an important development as Amerindian communities are the biggest private landowners in Guyana and the custodians of rich biodiversity. The Amerindian Act 2006 gives Amerindian communities control over access to this biodiversity and control over the use of their traditional knowledge. Although the Amerindian Act 2006 predates the Nagoya Protocol by four years, it already requires free prior informed consent as well as fair and equitable sharing. However Amerindians have not yet been able to use their resources and legal powers to build prosperous communities.

The Justice Institute is committed to facilitating the use of Amerindian languages wherever feasible as part of Guyana's rich cultural heritage. While English was the working language of the event, Region 9 toshaos were able to discuss issues in Wapichan with members of the Justice Institute team who speak Wapichan. Future events will continue the policy of using Amerindian languages along with English.

The event was launched at Moray House by HE Ambassador Robert Kopecky of the Delegation of the European Union and Mr Ulric Kinne deputy head of Mission for the German Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago. Also present were His Excellency Francisco Olguin Uribe, the Mexican Ambassador, and Ben ter Welle the German consul.

The event was hosted by the Justice Institute with the support of the ABS Capacity Development Initiative, a multi-donor initiative implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).



About the multi donor ABS Capacity Development Initiative managed by GIZ

The ABS Capacity Development Initiative aims to contribute to poverty reduction, food security, technology transfer, social development including equity and rights, and biodiversity conservation through implementing the Nagoya Protocol on ABS and the third objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity in its entirety. Established in 2006, the ABS Capacity Development Initiative is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and funded by the governments of Germany, Norway and Denmark, the Institut de la Francophonie pour le développement durable and the European Union.