

**An Indigenous Peoples' Statement to the World  
Delivered at The Parliament of the World's Religions  
Convened at Melbourne, Australia  
on the Traditional Lands  
of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation**

**December 9, 2009**

**In keeping with the theme of this year's Parliament: "Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, Healing the earth," We, the Indigenous Peoples participating in this Parliament hereby issue this statement:**

We are Indigenous Peoples and Nations who honor our ancestors and care for our future generations by preserving our lands and cultures. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have maintained a fundamental and sacred relationship with Mother Earth. As peoples of the land, we declare our inherent rights to our present and continuing survival within our sacred homelands and territories throughout the world;

We commend the Australian government's recent support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted on September 13, 2007. We call on all governments to support and implement the provisions of the UN Declaration, particularly the right of self-determination;

Since time immemorial we have lived in keeping with our sacred laws, principles, and spiritual values, given by the Creator. Our ways of life are based on thousands of years of accumulated ecological knowledge, a great respect for our Mother Earth, a reverence and respect for all our Natural World relations and the survival of our languages, cultures, and traditions;

The Indigenous instructions of sharing and the responsibility of leadership to future generations are wise and enduring. As the traditional nations of our lands we affirm the right to educate our children in our earth-based education systems in order to maintain our indigenous knowledge systems and cultures. These have also contributed to our spiritual, physical and mental health;

Indigenous peoples concept of health and survival is holistic, collective and individual. It encompasses the spiritual, the intellectual, the physical and the emotional. Expressions of culture relevant to health and survival of Indigenous Peoples includes relationships, families, and kinship, social institutions, traditional laws, music, dances, songs and songlines, reindeer and caribou, ceremonies and dreamtime, our ritual performances and practices, games, sports, language, mythologies, names, lands, sea, water, every life forms, and all documented forms and aspects of culture, including burial and sacred sites, human genetic materials, ancestral remains so often stolen, and our artifacts;

Unfortunately, certain doctrines have been threatening to the survival of our cultures, our languages, and our peoples, and devastating to our ways of life. These are found in particular colonizing documents such as the Inter Caetera papal bull of 1493, which called for the subjugation of non-Christian nations and peoples and "the propagation of the Christian empire." This is the root of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery that is still interwoven into

laws and policies today that must be changed. The principles of subjugation contained in this and other such documents, and in the religious texts and documents of other religions, have been and continue to be destructive to our ways of life (religions), cultures, and the survival of our Indigenous nations and peoples. This oppressive tradition is what led to the boarding schools, the residential schools, and the Stolen Generation, resulting in the trauma of Indigenous peoples being cut off from their languages and cultures, resulting in language death and loss of family integrity from the actions of churches and governments. We call on those churches and governments to put as much time, effort, energy and money into assisting with the revitalization of our languages and cultures as they put into attempting to destroy them;

The doctrines of colonization and dominion have laid the groundwork for contemporary problems of racism and dispossession. These problems include the industrial processes of resource exploitation and extraction by governments and corporations that has consistently meant the use of imposed laws to force the removal of Indigenous peoples from our traditional territories, and to desecrate and destroy our sacred sites and places. The result is a great depletion of biodiversity and the loss of our traditional ways of life, as well as the depletion and contamination of the waters of Mother Earth from mining and colonization.

Such policies and practices do not take into account that water is the first law of life and a gift from the Creator for all beings. Clean, healthy, safe, and free water is necessary for the continuity and well being of all living things. The commercialization and poisoning of water is a crime against life.

The negative ethics of contemporary society, discovery, conquest, dominion, exploitation, extraction, and industrialization, have brought us to today's crisis of global warming. Climate change is now our most urgent issue and affecting the lives of indigenous peoples at an alarming rate. Many of our people's lives are in crisis due to the rapid global warming. The ice melt in the north and rapid sea rise continue to accelerate, and the time for action is brief.

The Earth's resources are finite and the present global consumption levels are unsustainable and continue to affect our peoples and all peoples. Therefore, we join the other members of the Parliament in calling for prompt, immediate, and effective action at Copenhagen to combat climate change;

In July 2009, the Episcopal Church in the United States adopted a resolution at its 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention, repudiating and disavowing the dehumanizing Doctrine of Christian Discovery. By doing so, the Church took particular note of the charter issued by King Henry VII of England to John Cabot and his sons, which authorized the colonizing of North America.

It was by this 'boss over' tradition of Christian discovery that the British crown eventually laid claim to the traditional territories of the Aboriginal nations of the continent now called Australia, under terra nullius and terra nullus. This step by the Episcopal Church was an act of conscience and moral leadership by one of the world's major religions. Religious bodies of Quakers and Unitarians have taken similar supportive actions.

In Conclusion, we appeal to all people of conscience to join with us in support of the following issues:

- 1) Climate Change and its far-reaching impacts on our Peoples and homelands—for this we need immediate action.
- 2) The protection Indigenous peoples significant and sacred sites within their traditional homelands and territories and working to eradicate discrimination and intolerance against earth based Indigenous spiritual and ceremonial traditions.
- 3) Protection of Sacred Places used for prayer and ceremonies. At these special places we Minister to the earth and heal her sacred soul.
- 4) The critical need to strengthen and continue our unique cultures and languages, particularly by bringing together elder cultural and wisdom keepers and Indigenous youth.
- 5) The return of the bones of our ancestors and our sacred items.
- 6) The immediate support and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 8) To call upon Pope Benedict XVI and the Vatican to publicly acknowledge and repudiate the papal decrees that legitimized the original activities that have evolved into the dehumanizing Doctrine of Christian Discovery and dominion in laws and policies.