



Anglican Communion Office
at the United Nations

A Report On

The Eleventh Session on the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples – May 2012

Five hundred representatives from 370 million indigenous peoples from over 72 countries around the world met in New York for the eleventh session of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations. Comprising representation from at least 5000 distinct peoples, participants took part in the two week session, May 7 -18, to advance the rights and well-being of all indigenous peoples.

The two week session with many side events included discussions on the rights of indigenous peoples to food and food sovereignty and legal title to their lands, while concerns expressed included racial and religious discrimination, and the manner by which courts have justified the annexing of indigenous lands. The right to redress deprivation due to past conquests (articles 28 and 37 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) was passionately voiced.

Most indigenous peoples' grievances are the result of the legal precedent originating with the "Doctrine of Discovery." The Doctrine allowed Christian European countries to attack, enslave and kill the Indigenous Peoples encountered and to claim all of their assets - an historic claim underlying the conquest of the New World.

Many Christian churches have repudiated the Doctrine. They continue to help transform the legal, economic and social effects of this international framework. In 2007, the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, and in 2008, the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York, repudiated the doctrine. In 2009, at its 76th General Convention, the Episcopal Church USA adopted resolution D035 repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. In 2010, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada adopted resolution A086 repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. Also in 2010, the Religious Society of Friends adopted similar resolutions at its yearly meeting. Of late, various Unitarian Universalists churches and Quaker organizations are considering resolutions and minutes repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery.

In Australia, there are current safeguards for human rights protections for Indigenous Peoples. Constitutional recognition and reform for all Australian Indigenous Peoples is not just symbolic. In 2010, a referendum announced by Prime Minister Julia Gillard offered Australians an opportunity to take matters that are addressed in the United Nations Declaration into domestic laws.

When the Anglican Church of Canada formally renounced the Doctrine of Discovery in 2009, Bishop Mark MacDonald, a U.S. born cleric who was trained in Canada before becoming the Anglican Church's principal voice on native issues responded to news that the U.S. arm of the church had renounced the doctrine by asking Queen Elizabeth - the titular head of the global Anglican community - to "disavow and repudiate" it publicly.

The Episcopal Church USA's presence at the forum was prominent. Sarah Eagle Heart, Missioner, Indigenous Ministries, led a delegation from the Anglican Consultative Council. An indigenous person herself, Sarah expressed that she felt "both the pain and mistrust" the Doctrine of Discovery has caused. Today, indigenous peoples are still grappling with the legacy of policies and practices resulting from the doctrine, such as environmental poisoning leading to death, slavery, and the abuse of women. The Doctrine is ultimately responsible for causing tribes to be determined to fight for sovereignty rights.