

**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

PREAMBLE

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. We call on all governments to support and implement the provisions of the UN Declaration.

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, ceremonies and dreamtime, our ritual performances and practices, games, sports, language, mythologies, names, land, 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 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;

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In support of this historic event, the Episcopalian Church in the United States adopted a resolution at its 76th General Convention in July 2009, 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 Episcopalian 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: We hereby 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 Doctrine of Christian Discovery and Dominion.