

Haudenosaunee delegation advocates Doctrine disavowal

Indian Country Today by Gale Courey Toensing 12/14/09

A delegation of Haudenosaunee people at the [Parliament of World Religions](#) in Melbourne, Australia, plans to persuade the meeting to pass a resolution repudiating the Christian Doctrine of Discovery – and they have received help from Maine.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Tardiff, co-chairman of the Committee on Indian Relationships of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, wrote to Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, Nov. 30 offering the committee's support for the delegation's efforts.

The Episcopal Church passed a resolution, called Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery at the church's 76th General Convention July 8 – 17 in Anaheim. But the movement was spearheaded by John Dieffenbacker-Krall, a member of the Committee headed by Tardiff and the executive director of the Maine Indian Tribal State Commission.

Writing to Lyons as the leader of the delegation, Tardiff said, "I understand that the Haudenosaunee delegation intends to ask the people gathered at the event to pass a resolution similar to the Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery resolution adopted by the Episcopal Church. On behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations, an officially sanctioned group operating within the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, I offer my wholehearted support of your effort to expand international awareness of the evil Christian Doctrine of Discovery."

The Doctrine, which espouses the inherent superiority of one religion – Christianity – over all other religions, is antithetical to the Council for a Parliament of World Religions' mission, Tardiff wrote.

"Not only has the Doctrine of Discovery resulted in religion conflict, but it has also served as the underpinning of international law justifying the taking of indigenous lands and property across the world," he wrote.

The Parliament of the World's Religions is an interfaith organization that was formed in 1893. Since 1988, the organization has met roughly every five years in various places around the world. According to its Web site, the organization was created "to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world."

When the Indian Committee decided to sponsor the resolution, Tardiff said, it was motivated by the belief that "as Episcopalians we must decisively speak out about the moral bankruptcy of the Doctrine of Discovery and clearly state that it has no religious, ethical, moral, legal or political legitimacy."

He said the church has been “astounded” by the positive international reaction to its resolution. If the PWR adopts a similar resolution, Tardiff anticipates an even greater response.

Among the key topics at the PWR – the environment, poverty, building peace with justice – is reconciling with the world’s indigenous peoples.

“The Parliament offers the opportunity to continue with the reconciliation process that the Australian government began by apologizing to indigenous people for the wrongs committed against them. Using this Australian context, the Parliament will provide an opportunity for indigenous peoples around the world to voice their own concerns and aspirations,” according to the Web site.

In addition to Lyons, the delegation to the Dec. 3 – 9 event included Tonya Gonnella Frichner, Esq., Onondaga Nation, the North American Representative to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and president and founder of the American Indian Law Alliance; Steven Newcomb, Shawnee Lenape, the indigenous law research coordinator in the education department of the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, the author of “Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery,” and Indian Country Today columnist; Jake Swamp, a former chief of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation and a renowned educator and leader; Joanne Shenandoah, Oneida Indian Nation, award-winning singer-songwriter; Doug George-Kanentiio, Akwesasne Mohawk, an editor, columnist and author; scholars Philip Arnold and Mary McDonald.

Major speakers scheduled to appear at the Parliament included His Holiness the Dalai Lama and President Jimmy Carter.