

Minute on the Doctrine of Discovery

Approved July 25, 2012

New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions
Silver Bay, New York

2012-07-25. Indian Affairs Committee Co-clerk Susan Wolf (Ithaca) presented the proposed minute regarding repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery (also known as the Doctrine of Christian Discovery), a principle of international law that originated in Christian church law and has long been invoked as a basis for past colonization of indigenous lands and peoples. She cited examples of current uses of land in America that Native peoples consider to be desecrations.

The Committee has engaged the Yearly Meeting on this issue and its current relevance in U.S. law in conversations, publications, and postings on its page of the Yearly Meeting Web site. On July 9, 2012, the Witness Coordinating Committee approved the minute repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery.

In worship, we heard that churches worldwide have credited Friends and Anglicans for bringing to their attention the injustice of the Doctrine of Discovery, which was promulgated in Jesus' name, and which has profited Friends' historic migrations and settlements as well as those of others. We also heard a call to repentance, confession and the necessity of ongoing stewardship. The Yearly Meeting approved the following minute as proposed, with one Friend standing aside:

We seek to live in a just peace with our fellow human beings, both as individuals, and as peoples.

The United States has formally declared its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. We now call on the United States Senate to enact the legislation that will make this the law of the land in the United States of America.

We repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, which originated in the 15th century from Papal Bulls and European royal charters issued at that time. The Doctrine of Discovery mandated the seizure of lands belonging to any non-Christian peoples and encouraged the enslavement, exploitation, or eradication of those peoples. We cannot accept that the Doctrine of Discovery was ever a true authority for the forced takings of lands and the enslavement or extermination of peoples. It is reprehensible for the United States to use the Doctrine of Discovery as a legal doctrine to compel a jurisdiction over Indigenous Peoples or their lands.

We honor the inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples to their homelands, water, spiritual practices, languages, cultural practices, and to self-government, all of which sustain life and the life of a People, and the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous People has the right to make decisions and establish constructive arrangements with other nations, governments and peoples on their own behalf.

2012-07-26. At the request of the Indian Affairs Committee and the Witness Coordinating Committee, Friends directed the incoming Clerk and the General Secretary, in consultation with the incoming or continuing clerks of those committees, to disseminate widely the foregoing approved minute and its underlying concerns to the monthly meetings and Friends within New York Yearly Meeting, and to government officials, Friends organizations, other faith groups, Native nations, and other appropriate organizations.

2012-07-27. Friends approved minutes 25 and 26.