

Asia-Pacific Indigenous Peoples' Hearing on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology

The Indigenous Peoples' Declaration

We, Indigenous Peoples and church-based workers and organisations from Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand, have gathered together in Chiang Mai, Thailand for the AGAPE Consultation on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia and Pacific Conference of Churches. As part of our right to self-determination, we affirm a collective process of self identification complemented by the recognition of other groups. We are identified with, and have a close affinity to, our land, our oceans, our rivers, our forests, our air, our territories, our resources, our distinct languages, as well as our cultures and our beliefs. It is worthy to note that the Asia-Pacific region is home to approximately 280 million Indigenous Peoples of diverse religions or two-thirds of the world's indigenous population.

Historically, Indigenous Peoples have suffered colonisation, subjugation, integration and assimilation by merchants, traders, states and churches. All of which were aimed at eroding our identity.

The activities of merchants and traders had deprived and alienated us from our access to, and collective ownership of, natural resources, undermining our cultures, our languages and our religions. Governments have exacerbated the negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples by colluding with and advancing the interests merchants, traders, corporations and financial institutions.

The introduction of Christianity as a dominant religion impacted indigenous faith systems, values, traditions and cultures. Similarly, the education system introduced by missionaries, and thereafter by states, destroyed traditional indigenous languages and excluded indigenous history in textbooks, thereby undermining indigenous knowledge as well as the role of indigenous women in transferring traditional wisdom and communitarian values.

Today Indigenous Peoples continue to be the most marginalised, discriminated and exploited. For us the land and oceans are sacred. Yet, we are being driven out of our lands and oceans in the name of development that does not benefit us but, rather, causes the destruction of cultures, identities and life support systems. Community resistance is being met with violations of our collective rights. Further, neoliberal economic policies are promoting individualism and greed for profit for only the few. The dominant neoliberal development paradigm has resulted in ethnocide for many of our communities worldwide.

Our sustained struggles for the defence of our land, ocean, rivers, forests, life and resources had led to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 and the establishment of other mechanisms and procedures for Indigenous Peoples at the international, regional and national levels. In solidarity with Indigenous Peoples' movements, our issues are being taken up by civil society, churches and other faith-based groups.

We believe that poverty, wealth and ecology are very much interrelated and interdependent. We regard wealth in terms of our abundant resources and the produce from our lands that we share with our communities. Our understanding of wealth comprises our values, our close relations with our kin, our traditional leadership capabilities and our children who will ensure the continuity of our cultures. Furthermore, our understanding of ecology is based on our high regard for Mother Earth, our provider and a central element of our integrity. Taking us away from nonmaterial wealth and disregarding the spirituality of Mother Earth will make us poor. Our belief in the fullness of life includes both material and spiritual resources and our common heritage.

We need to hasten and strengthen our efforts to protect and improve our ways of life for our future generations. We will resort to spiritual activism as a means to being heard and will remain resolute in our struggles for the recognition and implementation of our rights.

We, the Indigenous Peoples of this consultation, call upon nation-states and churches in Asia and the Pacific, the ecumenical movement and international community to:

1. Promote, recognise and implement Indigenous Peoples' rights consistent with the UNDRIP;
2. Establish an independent mechanism which includes Indigenous Peoples and civil society to monitor the implementation of UNDRIP;
3. Endorse and use the UNDRIP as a minimum framework in dealing with Indigenous Peoples' issues;
4. Ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples through the implementation of the right to free, prior and informed consent in all development programmes, projects, legislations and policies;
5. Recognise Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and ways of life consistent with indigenous cultural values. This will include the promotion of indigenous worldviews, knowledge, wisdom, and practices to meet the needs of all;
6. Advocate for self-determination and food sovereignty;
7. Respect and recognise Indigenous Peoples as custodians of Mother Earth;
8. Strengthen solidarity among Indigenous Peoples and between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples based on non-discrimination, equality and mutual respect, social equity and peaceful coexistence;
9. Advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' issues within the various reference groups, advisory groups, commissions, and other relevant governance bodies of the WCC and other ecumenical organisations;
10. Maintain financing and re-sourcing and strengthen the role of the Indigenous Peoples desk as a priority at the WCC;
11. Convene a WCC working group to develop the terms of reference and scope for an Indigenous Peoples Christian Action Forum;
12. Promote self-understanding and recognition of Indigenous Peoples as going beyond nation-state boundaries;
13. Advocate the re-reading of the Bible with a strong justice and peace orientation;
14. Promote holistic, indigenous language-based education systems, including through integrating Indigenous Peoples' oral and expressive traditions of transfer of knowledge into current curricula; and

15. Promote indigenous principles of caring and sharing, acknowledge Indigenous Peoples' contribution to the sustenance of ecology and ensure equitable distribution of resources as integral to genuine development and as an alternative to the dominant neoliberal economic paradigm.