

Decision of the Church Conference of the Uniting Church in Sweden 2013 concerning a Statement about the Doctrine of Discovery

In February 2012, the Central Committee of the WCC issued the Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery and its enduring impact on indigenous peoples. In this statement WCC as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God. WCC also urges its member churches to reflect on their own national and church history, and to encourage all their congregations to seek a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples, to support Indigenous Peoples in their ongoing efforts to exercise their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights, to continue to raise awareness about the issues facing Indigenous Peoples and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of Indigenous Peoples

The Church Conference decided

to condemn and denounce the Doctrine of Discovery and supports the World Council of Churches statement.

to urge congregations to promote greater awareness of the issues affecting indigenous peoples and in particular Sami, to promote theological reflection on indigenous issues and to develop advocacy campaigns to support the rights, aspirations and needs of both Sami and indigenous peoples in other countries

to issue a statement as below:

Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery and indigenous peoples' situation in Sweden and in other countries

Today, about 500 million people belong to one of the over 5,000 indigenous peoples on earth. One of these indigenous peoples are the Sami people in our own country. Most indigenous peoples, including the Sami, have suffered severely from the colonization of their territories by other people, in many cases, of the Christian West. Still today, indigenous peoples suffer from discriminatory laws and regulations and their effects in terms of loss of land and natural resources, forced displacement, racism and a lack of basic welfare in comparison with the majority society. The basis for this is the so-called "Doctrine of Discovery". This doctrine says that Christian Europeans would have a moral and legal right to invade and take over a nation's land and assets and have dominion over other peoples, only based on their Christian identity.

A famous court case in the U.S. Supreme Court (Johnson vs. M'Intosh 1823) has had a major influence on subsequent case law until our own time. The dispute was about the ownership of land. The Court held that the United States has absolute sovereignty over all areas of North America, despite earlier treaties that recognize the sovereignty of Indian tribes, because Christian people have the right to take dominion over pagan peoples' lands. In the documentation it is referred to older principles that were written in three papal bulls : Dum Diversitas 1452, Romanus Pontifex 1455 and Inter Caetera in 1493. These ruled that Christian monarchs had the right to invade the newly

discovered areas west of the Azores, and subjugate its pagan inhabitants, take them to capture, enslave or kill them if they did not find themselves in the situation and take their possessions.

One can recognize the same ideas about Christians' right to take over the pagan lands in the Swedish-Norwegian colonization of Sápmi during the 16th century and onwards.

As a church, we meet various indigenous peoples in Sweden and, through the sister churches we cooperate with, in a number of different countries. The Christian history is unfortunately interconnected with the Doctrine of Discovery. Therefore it is important especially for churches to clarify where they stand in this matter.

Therefore the Church Conference wants to:

- express solidarity with the world's indigenous peoples and support their right to live in and make use of their traditional lands and preserve and develop their culture and traditions.*
- condemn the Doctrine of Discovery in all its forms because it is contradicts the gospel of Jesus Christ and it violates the inherent human rights which God has given to all individuals and peoples .*
- urge the Swedish government to work for a change of all legal structure and regulations environment based on this doctrine and the ideas it expresses, in Sweden and internationally , not the least in the UN, and instead strengthen indigenous peoples' possibilities to self-government regarding their own development.*