



RE: The 20th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Priority theme: Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development)

Written Statement from the Anglican Consultative Council, April 2021

The Anglican Communion is the world's third largest Christian communion, comprised of forty-one provinces across over 165 countries and representing 85 million members, all working in various capacities to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence, pursue peace and reconciliation, safeguard creation and act in loving service. The Anglican Consultative Council welcomes the theme of the 20th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Indigenous peoples continue to be “left behind” on most social, economic, and political indicators of Agenda 2030. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is dependent on the achievement of peace, justice and inclusion for all, including the full realisation of the rights of indigenous peoples. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-existing inequalities and discrimination have only worsened, and indigenous communities have been disproportionately impacted.

The concurrent crisis of climate catastrophe remains unresolved, and indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to these climate variations due to their reliance on nature as a source of income, sustenance, and cultural significance. Additionally, other issues of pertinence to indigenous communities, like the right to land, have also gone unaddressed, risking regression of indigenous communities' control over their land, territories, and resources.

Achieving the targets within Sustainable Development Goal 16 is critical to addressing persistent marginalisation faced by indigenous peoples. The Anglican Consultative Council is committed to advancing indigenous people's rights, achieving peace, justice and strong institutions through sustainable development and the vision of leaving no one behind. Indigenous Anglicans around the world are vital members of the Anglican Communion, and combatting discrimination, including against indigenous communities, is a core to the Christian belief that all are created equal in the eyes of God. In light of these commitments, we submit the following priorities and recommendations to the Forum:

Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted indigenous communities disproportionately, particularly indigenous women and girls, revealing existing structural inequalities and discrimination. Indigenous communities have been among those most left behind in the COVID-19 recovery and relief efforts, which have been implemented with a “one size fits all” approach, not adequately accounting for the particular vulnerabilities of indigenous communities. For example, due to their remoteness and geographic isolation,

many communities have had difficulty in accessing healthcare facilities. Many indigenous people, especially elders, are at higher risk for exacerbated effects of the virus as they are already living with chronic health conditions and lack access to routine medical care. Decades of inadequate funding for basic infrastructure in indigenous communities have led to disparities in nutrition, housing, and clean water.

Indigenous people live in tight-knit communities rooted in unity and collective traditions. Lockdown measures like social distancing make practicing these traditions and providing support difficult, leading to an acute mental health crisis within indigenous societies. Anglican church leaders, among others, have been vital in the COVID-19 response and provision of pastoral care to combat this trend. Anglican dioceses have looked to social media and online spaces as a replacement for in-person gatherings, while others have relied on phone systems to provide support and connection. The Maori Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand has responded to the lockdown by offering online options for fellowship and worship, including Sunday Eucharist services, daily morning prayer and evensong. These solutions, however, fall short of meeting the needs of indigenous communities, especially those without access to phones or internet, revealing a major digital divide that underscores the need for increased service provision to indigenous communities.

Indigenous Knowledge in mitigating Climate Change

Many indigenous communities live in biologically diverse regions and rely heavily on the natural world as a defining element for identity and culture, as well as a source of sustenance and income. As such, they are particularly vulnerable to climate change, for example in the Pacific region where the climate crisis has led to rising sea levels, the salination of soil, and erratic weather patterns. Climate-related trends are destroying ways of life for indigenous communities, impacting culture, family dynamics, and forcing migration to urban areas where traditional clan and social structures are not recognised or tolerated. Climate change also exacerbates political and economic marginalisation, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment.

The Anglican Communion's fifth Mark of Mission is "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth." Across the Communion—from the Pacific, to the Caribbean, to Latin America--indigenous Anglicans are often on the frontlines of the climate crisis and retain traditional wisdom on living in harmony with creation and being good stewards of the land. Indigenous voices, knowledge, and solutions must be at the forefront of combating climate change, including nature-based solutions to climate mitigation, creation of respect for the Earth, sustainable consumption of resources and models of resilience.

In 2020, the Anglican Indigenous Network partnered with the Anglican Communion Environmental Network to release a four-part series of webinars that offered Indigenous Anglican perspectives on the environmental emergency and a prophetic vision for a better future. These webinars included voices from Aotearoa and Polynesia, Africa, Amazonia and the Arctic. The initiative aimed to share stories on the impact of climate change, uphold traditional knowledge of indigenous communities, identify best practices of climate mitigation and adaptation, and tread a way forward towards climate justice.

Indigenous Peoples' Right to Land

The realisation of indigenous peoples' rights is imperative to sustaining peace, and must include the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices and ensuring access to justice. However, this is a right that indigenous people continue to see denied as many national government policies continue to exclude indigenous groups from decision-making on land usage and pursue development priorities without respecting the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, in the context of a long history of dispossession. Sustainable peace must include ensuring indigenous peoples' rights to preserve traditional lands, environmental resources, languages, belief systems, and other elements of cultural heritage that are an integral part of indigenous identity.

Indigenous Anglicans throughout the Communion are working to uphold the right to land and protect indigenous communities. For example, indigenous leaders in the Brazilian Amazon, which is currently being exploited through mining and burning without community consent, have launched a course for emerging social leaders supported by the Anglican Diocese of the Amazon with the help of the Episcopal Diocese of California. The course aims to educate and equip communities, including indigenous youth, to combat the consequences of the exploitation of their land and engage in joint actions to resist dispossession and illegal land grabs. Other similar efforts are taking place in other parts of the world.

Recommendations

We urge Member States, UN agencies, and civil society to:

1. Accelerate the implementation and fulfill the vision of the 2030 Agenda by protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, as reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2. Mandate the inclusion of relevant indicators for indigenous peoples in data collection and review of Agenda 2030, enabling data-disaggregation; engage indigenous communities in data collection; and recognise indigenous identity in national statistics.
3. Ensure indigenous peoples' participation in implementation, follow-up and review of Agenda 2030, national action plans, and voluntary national reviews at the High-Level Political Forum.
4. Include indigenous people in policy-making and design of resilient and adaptable structures that meet the specific needs of indigenous people, including accessible healthcare institutions, adequate housing and sanitary conditions, and systems of psychological support.
5. Ensure compliance with the rule of law, particularly treaties and international regulations that recognise indigenous peoples' right to land and self-determination, including their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

6. Recognise the positive role of faith communities in combating past sins of colonisation and in rebuilding structures for the full realisation of indigenous rights, considering them key stakeholders and partners in the multi-tiered approach to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 in indigenous communities.

7. Acknowledge the increased vulnerability of indigenous communities to climate change and the importance of traditional knowledge in climate mitigation by including indigenous communities and organisations in the creation of climate-resilient infrastructures and policies.