

A Unitarian Universalist Resolution
To Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery,
and Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

BECAUSE as Unitarian Universalists we believe that all persons have inherent worth and dignity; that human relations should be based on justice, equity and compassion; that this world should be a community of peace, liberty and justice for all; and that we seek to live in peace with our fellow human beings, both as individuals and as peoples; and

WHEREAS, the Doctrine of Discovery was a principle of “law” developed in a series of 15th century papal bulls and 16th century charters by European monarchs by which the Americas were first explored, and was the “legal authority” used by those who colonized Native Peoples, appropriated Indian lands and resources, and attempted to dominate Native nations and undermine inherent Native sovereignty; and

WHEREAS, after the United States Revolutionary War, the tenets of Discovery were continued by the new states and courts, controlling all purchase of Indian lands and any foreign, personal, or commercial interactions with tribes; and

WHEREAS, in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823), Chief Justice John Marshall stated that discovery rights annulled pre-existing rights of “ancient possessors,” and that “power, war, conquest, give rights, which after possession, are conceded by the world...”; thus having the *Johnson* decision influence all subsequent thinking in federal Indian law to this day; and

WHEREAS, for more than five centuries, the interpretive framework of the Doctrine of Discovery has been institutionalized and used as a right of dominance over the existence of Indigenous Peoples, assuming the right to take, grant, and dispose of their lands, territories, and resources without their permission or consent; and

WHEREAS, we as Unitarian Universalists, along with the U.S. government, and society at large, must all acknowledge that federal Indian law and modern day treatment of tribes and Indians is based on the centuries old Doctrine of Discovery; and also

WHEREAS, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was overwhelmingly adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007, without conditions and/or qualifications, after more than 20 years of discussions and deliberations by thousands of Indigenous nations, governments, organizations, and peoples from around the world; and

WHEREAS, the Declaration is a positive move towards creating true reform to respect and recognize the right of Indigenous Peoples to sovereignty and self-determination; and

WHEREAS, the Declaration is the most comprehensive, international human rights instrument explicitly addressing the economic, social, cultural, political, spiritual and environmental rights of Indigenous Peoples and is essential to the dignity, survival and well-being of over 340 million Indigenous Peoples world-wide; and

WHEREAS, the Declaration is described in the preamble “as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect;” and

WHEREAS, the rights addressed in the Declaration are consistent with other international human rights instruments that the United States already has ratified and is implementing in myriad federal laws, policies, treaties, agreements, and executive orders; and

WHEREAS, all four UN-member nations (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States) who initially voted against the Declaration have reversed their positions, and

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples from around the world are asking all religious faiths and their respective national and international organizations to rescind the Doctrine of Discovery and related documents, and to call for the United States to implement the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

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THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, as an Unitarian Universalist congregation, repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery as a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and of religious, cultural, and racial biases having no place in the modern day treatment of the American Indians; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we call on the leadership of the Unitarian Universalist Association to make a clear and concise statement repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and its current use in U. S, federal Indian laws and regulations, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we ask other UU congregations to join us in passing similar resolutions, and assisting us in presenting an Action for Immediate Witness on this issue during an upcoming UUA General Assembly, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we encourage other communities of faith to reject the use of the Doctrine of Discovery to dominate Indigenous Peoples, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we call on Pope Benedict XVI of the Catholic Church, Queen Elizabeth II of England, to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that we recommend a congressional commission be established to be comprised of Native leaders and representatives of the U.S. Interior, Justice and State departments, and charged to determine how U.S. policy and laws should be amended to eliminate the practices of colonialism contained in the Doctrine of Discovery, and to meet the standards of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Adopted on **January 29, 2011** by **Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria**