



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INDIGENOUS VOICES

BACKGROUND

The Doctrine of Discovery

Eleventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Discussion on Monday, 7 May 2012, 3pm – 6pm

The special theme of the eleventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – the Doctrine of Discovery – refers to the way in which courts historically justified the annexing of indigenous lands.

With the discussion of “The Doctrine of Discovery: its enduring impact on indigenous peoples and the right to redress for past conquests,” the Permanent Forum intends to build on past debates, but in a “forward-thinking” dialogue, not solely focused on historical wrongs.


The Doctrine of Discovery provided that, by law and divine intention, European Christian countries gained power and legal rights over indigenous non-Christian peoples immediately upon their “discovery” by Europeans. To benefit their own countries, various European monarchs and their legal systems developed this principle, which has become institutionalized in law and policy, at national and international levels.

Today, the Doctrine of Discovery is still being applied to indigenous peoples notwithstanding its Eurocentric, religious and racial underpinnings, and is often marked by the violations of cultural practices and spiritual expressions, expropriation of lands, territories and resources and ongoing violations of indigenous peoples’ human rights.

The discussion between Member States, indigenous peoples, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations and other key players will focus on issues related to justice, reconciliation and peace, and offer concrete examples for governments and indigenous peoples to work together to build a future based on mutual respect, equity and justice.



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For more information on the eleventh session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, please see: <http://social.un.org/index/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>