



Interfaith Center on
Corporate Responsibility

Inspired by faith, committed to action

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His Excellency Ambassador John Bolton
United States Mission to the United Nations
140 East 45th Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

Your Excellency:

We write to you as members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), to urge that the United States support adoption of the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People at this session of the General Assembly.

ICCR is a membership organization of 275 faith-based institutional investors, including pension funds, endowments, hospital corporations and religious communities. In addition, many socially responsible investment firms and public pension funds are associates of ICCR, which has been a leader of the socially responsible investment (SRI) movement for 35 years. Our members, whose combined portfolio value exceeds \$110 billion, use their financial influence to engage companies in dialogue regarding corporate social, environmental and governance practices. Concern for the rights and dignity of disenfranchised peoples has been central to the mission of ICCR since its founding.

Increasingly, governments and companies are acknowledging the important role of local communities and indigenous peoples in shaping and determining development which affects their lives. In our own work we have observed the emergence of new norms of corporate behavior, recognized by both international financial institutions and private banks, which encourage companies to engage indigenous communities in meaningful negotiations regarding projects that affect indigenous lands and resources. Consequently, we were pleased to learn from the American Indian Law Alliance that the Human Rights Council, which overwhelmingly approved the Declaration this summer, has recommended that the General Assembly adopt the Declaration¹

¹ Human Rights Council Resolution 2006/2 and annexed Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/declaration.htm>. The 30 states voting in favor were: 1) Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay; 2) Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, U.K.; 3) Cameroon, Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia; 4) China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka. 2 states voted against adoption:

Adoption of the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People is a critical milestone on the road to economic justice and true democracy for those who, historically, have been dispossessed and denied a voice in decisions that affect their very survival.

We understand that the General Committee of the General Assembly may take one of several approaches to the Declaration. We respectfully urge that the Declaration be sent directly to the plenary body of the General Assembly for the following reasons:

1. For over 20 years now, the Declaration has been open to the scrutiny and input of all interested parties: states, indigenous peoples, NGOs, international agencies. The present text embodies the closest meeting of the minds of such parties that is achievable at this time. Nothing would be gained by extending its scrutiny further, and indeed valuable UN resources would be dissipated in the exercise.

2. Moreover, as a Declaration, the instrument is not legally binding, and consequently merits no additional legalistic scrutiny even if resources were not scarce.

3. As a normative document, however, the Declaration can and should perform the urgently needed task of launching a rich, concrete and good faith set of exercises in indigenous-state partnerships that will, with time, reveal what the best practices of such partnerships entail, providing in the process data needed for the crafting of an eventual Convention.

4. Other actors in the international community such as international financial institutions, corporations, private foundations, and NGOs are already tailoring their activities to comply with the norms in the Declaration and to advance its goals.

Ambassador Bolton, we urge the United States to affirm the principles of justice and democracy for indigenous peoples around the world by voicing strong support for the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at this 61st session of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

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