



CANADIAN
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CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

Name of resolution: Adding Terra Nullius to the CUC's Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery motion 2023

Approved at the CUC Annual General Meeting, May 25, 2024

BACKGROUND

1. The Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), at its 2023 Annual Meeting, passed the following [resolution](#) to denounce the **Doctrine of Discovery** that read:
"BE IT RESOLVED that:
 - a. The Canadian Unitarian Council formally repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery, and urges its member congregations to do the same;
 - b. CUC will add our name to the list of faith organizations who have already repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, and this will be communicated to the member congregations;
 - c. The CUC advocates for legislation to formally enact the repudiation of the Doctrine nationally and within Canadian legal systems;
 - d. An Action Group be set up immediately to plan the implementation of this repudiation."
2. The doctrine of ***Terra Nullius*** ("**nobody's land**") is closely tied to the Doctrine of Discovery in that it provided justification for European occupation and settlement of North America and elsewhere. Land could be declared "nobody's land" if it was not already occupied by a recognized state. The European nations did not, of course, recognize the continent's existing population and their groupings as "states". Consequently, the European nations deemed themselves justified in occupying the lands and proclaiming sovereignty.



3. The CUC’s 1968 resolution on ‘[Native Peoples and Us](#)’ noted “there is a gulf between the native peoples of Canada and the immigrant peoples and the CUC urges its member societies to make a beginning at bridging that gulf themselves, undertaking programs of mutual discovery through individual and group face-to-face interactions between whites and Indians.”
4. There are [other CUC resolutions](#) in the past about First Peoples in Canada, the “New World” and later globally (UNDRIP) expressing self-determination and multi-culturalism within the concept of mutual respect.
5. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its final report, stated in Call to Action #49: “We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.”
6. Many Indigenous nations globally and First Peoples in Canada have asked for the repudiation of both The Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius in concert with The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report wording.
7. In congruence with the eighth CUC principle and in harmony with the intention of the other best progressive virtues to listen and respect.

RESOLVED that:

1. Regarding the **Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery** motion passed at the 2023 CUC Annual Meeting:
 - i. The words “and the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*” be appended to the phrase “the Doctrine of Discovery” (or “the Doctrine”, as the case may be); and
 - ii. The remainder of the resolution be amended to reflect that it now refers to two doctrines instead of one;

such that the amended resolution reads:



1. The Canadian Unitarian Council formally repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery and the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*, and urges its member congregations to do the same;
 2. The CUC will add our name to the list of faith organizations who have already repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery and the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*, and this will be communicated to the member congregations;
 3. The CUC advocates for legislation to formally enact the repudiation of both doctrines nationally and within Canadian legal systems;
 4. An Action Group be set up immediately to plan the implementation of these repudiations.
2. The **Action Plan** proposed at the same meeting to enact the above resolution be modified to incorporate the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* in the same manner as the Doctrine of Discovery, such that learnings and recommendations can be included in the report of the Action Group anticipated to be delivered at the 2025 Annual Meeting.
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