

**Intervention by
the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society
of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America
to the
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
14th session
20 April – 1 May 2015**

Agenda item 3c - Youth, self-harm and suicide

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Distinguished Chairperson, Excellencies, delegates, members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, honorable elders, representatives of indigenous peoples organizations, the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, relatives, my name is Jasmine Bostock and I bring you Aloha from Hawaii.

It is my great honor to address you as a delegate to this 14th session of the Forum, representing the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, also known as The Episcopal Church. We are two million Christians in 17 countries, many of whom are indigenous. We are also a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Restoring right relations with indigenous peoples is a priority for our Church. As Christians, we believe that all human beings are created in God's image and that our scriptures, the way of Jesus Christ and our Baptismal Covenant call us to "seek and serve Christ in all persons". We grieve and lament with our indigenous young people, their families and communities when they suffer. Based on the witness and wisdom of our indigenous peoples in our communities and congregations, we wish to offer the following recommendations:

First, eradicate the harmful root causes that inflict pain on our young people, so that healing can occur. Self-harm among youth results from intergenerational trauma that must be addressed by identifying root causes and implementing structural change. We must:

1. Promote positive images of indigenous peoples in social settings and remove harmful mascot images, so that young people can take pride in their indigenous identity rather than feel devalued by the larger society.
2. Expand school curricula to include the positive, meaningful contributions of indigenous peoples to the narratives about each country's formation, history and society.
3. Restore to indigenous peoples their rightful place on lands and in government structures, so that they are not oppressed, marginalized, unfairly represented, or bereft of resources and services. Even as we meet, the removal of government services in West Australia is forcing the closure of remote and rural Aboriginal communities.

Second, care for the environment that our Creator has entrusted to us. As indigenous peoples, we consider ourselves connected not only to each other as relatives, but also to the Earth. The adverse effects of harmful environmental practices and extractive industries that provoke changes in our climate and environment are equivalent to collective, societal self-harm. These practices destroy our understanding of ourselves as part of the sacredness of all creation. Our relationship to land and water is broken by the removal of our lands and violation of our sacred sites. We urge you to think of the social message sent to native

Hawaiian youth who are watching their elders be arrested for protecting their traditionally sacred mountain, Mauna Kea, from being appropriated for science.

Third, accelerate the restoration and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples by honoring the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). We call for disaggregated data accounting for indigenous peoples in the targets and indicators of the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Member states must honestly report statistics and name unnatural deaths for what they are.

Finally, we encourage you to actively partner with faith-based organizations. We ask you to see us not only as agents responsible for historical wrongs, but also as currently working to reverse that trauma and promote reconciliation and healing. Since repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery in 2009, The Episcopal Church has been actively engaged in ministries for healing historical and generational trauma, directed towards youth. Faith-based organizations provide for contemporary spiritual needs among indigenous communities and they are actively engaged in revitalizing indigenous culture and languages. Indigenous wisdom holds in great reverence the sacredness of our creation and our beings, which is theologically recognized and supported by the Christian Gospel. Faith-based organizations are eager and ready to partner with Indigenous Peoples in dreaming, praying, and creating a world where self-harm and suicide are eliminated for all peoples.

Distinguished relatives, we all want our youth to enjoy good health and well-being. We applaud the Forum's decision to address "youth, self-harm and suicide", while noting that all age groups suffer. We believe that our Creator remains close to the broken-hearted and comforts those who are crushed in spirit, and also calls us to speak up for the oppressed. We urge your acts of mercy and healing for our indigenous young people. Thank you.