

**Oral statement 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  
15<sup>th</sup> session  
May 9<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Agenda item 10: Future work of the Permanent Forum**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Distinguished members of the Permanent Forum, honorable elders and representatives of indigenous peoples' and other organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear relatives,

My name is the Reverend Canon Robert Two Bulls, and I am an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Nation and a priest in The Episcopal Church, also known as the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Our organization counts, among its two million members in 17 countries, many Indigenous Peoples from at least fifteen tribal nations. Many of these people worship in faith communities that not only span generations but are usually located in communities that have extreme poverty issues.

It is with these economic and social development needs in mind that I would like to offer some recommendations for the future work of the Permanent Forum, based on my experiences and observations:

1. I will state first that unbridled capitalism has always been the dirge of Indigenous Peoples. Historically, Indigenous communities have had a difficult time participating in this economic system. There are a multitude of reasons why this is so. And I think the core one is that this system promotes individuality which goes against the grain of Indigenous cultural mores. There is a need, then, to promote the idea that starting-up and bolstering small businesses in Indigenous communities is for the greater good. More needs to be done in terms of supporting individuals in basic business management as well as helping them secure business loans. Also, it is a proven fact that the more small businesses there are, the more there is an increase in the opportunities for employment.
2. Living in poverty shortens one's life span and strengthens the social ills that emerge from it, such as substance abuse, domestic violence and high incarceration and suicide rates, to name just a few. Living in these conditions also makes it harder to learn and maintain Indigenous languages and knowledge. I am heartened, however, by the attention that has been given to Indigenous languages and knowledge during this Forum. We are now at a critical time today where we need to find innovative ways that will recognize, promote and protect Indigenous language and knowledge. Without it, we are lost.

Mr. Chair, these observations and recommendations stem from my work as an Episcopal priest in several geographical contexts in the United States. This includes thirty years of substance abuse recovery work, addressing economic realities of life on reservations where a local economy may be non-existent, feeding our Indigenous populations and encouraging

healthy eating habits through urban gardening and promoting a historically Indigenous diet, and work on death and dying amongst communities with high rates of suicide.

I would like to add a word about my organization's commitment to Indigenous Peoples. The Episcopal Church has made an organizational priority of restoring right relations with Indigenous Peoples, both within its churches and programs, and through its work with local communities, national governments and the United Nations (UN). We have officially supported the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, in 2009, were one of the first faith-based organizations to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, leading the way for other faith-based organizations to do the same. We have organized workshops on dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery and healing historical and generational trauma. Since our organization obtained Economic and Social Council consultative status in 2014, our Indigenous delegates have attended every UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as well as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. All of these actions are based on the will, witness and wisdom of our Indigenous Episcopal leaders.

In addition, our organization actively supports and participates in the overall work of the United Nations in many areas, including Agenda 2030 and the intent and direction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, we voted to support the SDGs and are now focused on raising awareness in our communities so that we can fully participate in their implementation.

Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an Indigenous man who has dedicated my life to working with Indigenous Peoples both on Reservations and in Urban areas, I know that there is much work that needs to be done. And we still have a long road ahead of us in this work. I am grateful, as is my organization and our Indigenous communities, for the existence of the Permanent Forum so that we can advance together in this work to improve the lives of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. We are your committed partners, and we thank you for your partnership.