

STRENGTH
PEACE
UNITY

Mohawk Council of Kahnawake

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April 17, 2023

POPE FRANCIS

Apostolic Palace
00120
Vatican City

RE: Comments of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

Wa'tkonnonhwerá:ton/Greetings Pope Francis,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Grand Chief of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke, governing body for the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, an Indigenous community within what is presently known as Quebec, Canada. We write to you to express our disappointment with the content of the Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development on the “Doctrine of Discovery”, 30.03.2023 (“Joint Statement”).

As you know, the application of the doctrine of discovery has caused immeasurable harm on our community, our ancestors, on all Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island (North America) and around the world. Several hundred years later, this doctrine still exists through the generations of legislation and policy that state governments have imposed on the lands, resources, and the peoples that these lands and resources were taken from. In fact, the application of the doctrine of discovery still manifests itself in Canadian law today. For example, the ongoing application of the *Indian Act* and of the legal tests developed by Canadian Courts that force Indigenous Peoples to prove the existence of limited aboriginal rights subject to ultimate Crown title and federal and provincial authority over lands and resources.

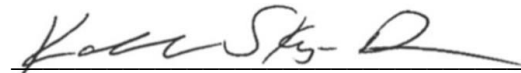
While the Vatican’s statement recognized some of the harm caused by the application of the doctrine, we are disappointed that the Vatican failed to take full responsibility for its role in the development and application of the doctrine. The Joint Statement emphasized that the papal bulls were “manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers” therefore minimizing and disregarding the intricate relationship between the Vatican and state governments at that point in time, and thus the role that the Vatican knowingly played in the colonization of Indigenous lands and Peoples. Furthermore, rather than formally rescinding the papal bulls (declarations) that founded the doctrine of discovery, the Vatican chose to merely take symbolic action by issuing a statement only repudiating the concepts of the doctrine (see Section 7 of Joint Statement).

The Joint Statement should have formally rescinded the papal bulls, included the identification of necessary steps to change the application of the doctrine, and called upon church and state

institutions to repair the historic harms that were directly and indirectly caused by the application of the doctrine. Most importantly, the Vatican must call upon state governments to work with Indigenous peoples to identify means to address the constitutional, legislative and policy instruments that the doctrine was used as the foundation for, and that are still applied to our peoples today.

The MCK calls upon the Vatican to follow-up on the Joint Statement by taking full responsibility for its role in the application of the doctrine of discovery on our Peoples and to call upon church and state institutions to take concrete measures to repair historic harms and to rescind present-day laws and policies that are founded on the application of the doctrine.

In Peace and Friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Grand Chief Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer

cc. Council of Chiefs, MCK