

BWA adopts resolution on justice for indigenous people

July 5, 2023

The Baptist World Alliance General Council adopted a resolution condemning the historic and ongoing mistreatment of indigenous people around the world.

The resolution “calls on Baptist churches, colleges, unions and other institutions to study their own history and present complicity with discrimination” against indigenous people.

It also urges “more work toward restorative justice efforts to end discrimination ... and repair the damage from past wrongs.”

Lamentation and confession

The resolution—adopted without opposition at the BWA annual gathering in Stavanger, Norway—“laments that some Baptists and other Christians participated in injustices” against indigenous people.

It mentions “killing people, seizing land, kidnapping children, running residential schools or other institutions to eliminate cultures and languages, and restricting civil and religious rights.”

It specifically denounces “the seizure of land, treaty violations, forced migration, segregation, employment and religious discrimination, mistreatment by law officials, contamination of vital natural resources, and other injustices” toward indigenous people groups.

The resolution goes on to recognize the doctrine of discovery—a legal and religious principle used to justify colonial conquest—“remains embedded in

some national laws, societal attitudes ... and even in some Christian resources.”

The resolution commends some Christian leaders—such as Roger Williams in Rhode Island—who treated indigenous people with dignity and respect, along with indigenous Baptist leaders who “faithfully ministered even amid difficult circumstances, inadequate and inequitable support, and discrimination from other Baptists.”

It registers support for evangelistic and discipleship efforts to all people—“provided that such methods respect the humanity, culture, language, conscience and land of each person.”

The resolution “commends continuing Baptist efforts to acknowledge past injustices, apologize to indigenous peoples, advocate for justice, and work toward building more inclusive fellowships.”

Last year, the BWA General Council adopted resolutions that denounced racism as “a sin against humanity and God” and called for reparations for chattel slavery.

One of the 2022 resolutions called for “restorative racial justice” that requires “individual and corporate repentance, lament, and recognition of wrongs done and suffering imposed on oppressed people.”

Recognizing the broad scope of racism, the 2022 resolution also stated, “There are countless examples of racial prejudice on every continent, including the mistreatment of Indigenous people and their land.”

Mona Khaulı recognized with award

At the 2023 meeting in Norway, the BWA General Council also recognized Mona Khaulı as the 2023 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award recipient.

Khouri is from Lebanon and served as a vice president of BWA during Lotz's tenure as general secretary.

"I am Greek Orthodox by birth, Presbyterian by marriage and Baptist by choice," she said.

Referencing the life of Moses—who thought he was somebody during his first 40 years, discovered in his second 40 years he was a nobody and learned in his last 40 years "what God can do with a nobody"—Khouri said she is at that last stage of Moses' life, learning what God can do with a nobody.

Khouri was honored for her humanitarian work in Lebanon during that country's civil war, which she said was "not civil". Although she could have left Lebanon, she stayed and faced bombings and the fear of kidnapping in order to care for people suffering from the war.

She credited the prayers of Baptists around the world for her ability to "persist and resist" under the circumstances.