

Indigenous Rights In The Commonwealth Must Be Recognised

The Commonwealth of Nations should develop standards relating to the rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

The United Nations, the European Union and the Organisation of American States have identified Indigenous Peoples as distinct populations and have prepared documents for the promotion of Indigenous rights.

However the Commonwealth has been, and remains, silent on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

CAIP is concerned by unofficial reports that the rights of Indigenous Peoples will never be recognised by the Commonwealth, and that Indigenous Peoples' issues are matters which should be left to 'domestic' resolution.

Throughout the regions of the Commonwealth Indigenous Peoples continue to struggle for the return of their lands and the economic independence to maintain their culture and social structures.

The Indigenous Peoples' struggle is a legacy of past colonial domination, the unlawful dispossession of their lands and property, and contemporary political and judicial ignorance concerning Indigenous laws.

Almost all Indigenous Peoples in the Commonwealth share a common history and status, of economic exploitation, resulting in anglo-saxon wealth and Indigenous poverty today.

Despite the common pattern of anglo-saxon domination, Indigenous Peoples have extremely different legal and political outcomes within the different countries of the Commonwealth.

This becomes obvious when comparing the situations in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Even in South Africa, where the white minority held all political and economic power until recently, the Indigenous Peoples are somehow in a unique legal position within the Commonwealth.

In the best situations, the Indigenous Peoples have achieved their sovereign independence and even economic independence from colonisation.

In other, lesser situations, the Indigenous Peoples have recognition in the constitutions and other legal instruments.

Unfortunately, in the worst situations the Indigenous Peoples are economically, socially and politically oppressed, cannot get remedy through the government, and have no recourse to legal arguments to defend their rights.

CAIP seeks to have the Commonwealth of Nations re-examine the definition of democracy to ensure it includes participation by the Indigenous Peoples in their own governance, their economic independence and future security, and their control over programs for their own well-being.

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