



Pacific Conference of Churches

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UN MUST MOVE FROM MANAGING COLONIALISM TO ENDING IT IN KANAKY

SUVA, 16 June 2026 — The United Nations cannot continue to document colonial injustice in Kanaky New Caledonia without using its mandate to bring colonialism to an end.

This was the message presented by the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Église Protestante de Kanaky Nouvelle-Calédonie to the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization in New York on 15 June, New York time.

Addressing the C-24 session on the Question of New Caledonia, PCC General Secretary Rev. James Shri Bhagwan and EPKNC General Secretary Rev. Billy Wetewea called for urgent action to protect the Kanak people's right to self-determination.

Rev. Wetewea said the EPKNC had spoken prophetically for Kanak independence since 1979, while affirming the dignity of all communities.

"Affirming Kanak existence does not deny the rights of others. The justice we seek is not against anyone, but for life, peace and dignity for all," he said.

Forty years after New Caledonia was reinscribed on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, the Church carried to the Committee the voices of families, women, young people, customary leaders and communities still living with the wounds of the crisis that began in May 2024.

Families have lost employment and income. Children have struggled to return to school. Poverty, unequal access to education and the overrepresentation of Kanak people in prison expose a deeper political and moral crisis.

"Order without justice is not peace. Silence under pressure is not consent," Rev. Wetewea said. Rev. Bhagwan said the Pacific Peoples' Mission to Kanaky New Caledonia confirmed that the events of May 2024 were not an isolated breakdown of public order.

The Mission, organised by the Pacific Network on Globalisation, Pacific Conference of Churches and the Église Protestante de Kanaky Nouvelle-Calédonie, was conducted in April 2025 and found that the uprising emerged from an unfinished and flawed decolonisation process, long-standing inequality, unfulfilled commitments to rebalance power and repeated breaches of trust by the administering Power.

It also witnessed how women, young people, customary leaders and churches shared food, reopened community markets, supported families and helped restore calm.

“Peace in Kanaky is already being woven from within. It cannot be imposed from Paris,” Rev. Bhagwan said.

The presentations also drew attention to United Nations findings concerning the contested 2021 referendum, the requirement for free, prior and informed consent, excessive and lethal force, arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and the transfer of Kanak detainees to European France.

“These findings cannot remain in separate United Nations files. The United Nations must act as one system,” Rev. Bhagwan said.

PCC challenged the C-24 to examine its own approach as the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism moves towards its final years.

“With fewer than five years remaining, the Committee must ask whether annual discussions and repeated resolutions, without a visiting mission, measurable benchmarks or a decolonisation timetable, are advancing freedom or simply managing delay.

“Kanak must not be carried unfinished into another decade.”

The church leaders warned that elections could not replace a comprehensive political settlement. Any electoral process must form part of a credible and freely negotiated pathway to self-determination.

PCC and EPKNC called on the Special Committee to:

- accept the Pacific Peoples’ Mission report;
- dispatch a joint C-24 and Melanesian Spearhead Group mission;
- deploy a United Nations electoral assessment mission;
- call for the release of Kanak political prisoners and the return of detainees transferred to European France;
- integrate recent United Nations human rights findings into the C-24 process;
- and establish a clear decolonisation timetable respecting the Nouméa Accord and Kanak customary institutions.

The dismissal of charges against FLNKS President Christian Téin and 13 others also raised serious questions about their arrest, transfer and prolonged separation from their communities.

“Trust cannot be rebuilt through punishment first and evidence later,” Rev. Bhagwan said.

Rev. Wetewea reminded the Committee that it was not created simply to document colonial injustice.

“It was created to end it. Our Church does not call for hatred or revenge. We call for truth, justice and peace.”

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