

Proponents: International Committee and National Office
Email: director@nlg.org

Challenging Empire: National Lawyers Guild Resolution in Support of Anti-Colonialism,
Anti-Racism, and Indigenous Sovereignty

“Indigenous political structures and economic systems do not apply only to Indigenous people. Our liberation is bound to the liberation of all humans and the planet. What we seek is a world premised on Indigenous *values* of interspecies responsibility and balance. We seek to uplift knowledges, technologies, governance structures, and economic strategies that will make these values possible, in the immediate future and in the long term, and which always have the future health of the land at the center of their design and implementation, Indigenous or not. In this sense, decolonization is for, and benefits, everyone. It also needs our collective cooperation to succeed.”

– *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth* by The Red Nation (2021)

The National Lawyers Guild mission to value people and the planet over property requires us to value anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and Indigenous liberation and sovereignty in our organization, our work, and ourselves. Anti-colonialism is an intersection of our values of internationalism, environmental and ecological justice, racial justice, and economic justice, among others. We acknowledge the importance of supporting anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and Indigenous sovereignty throughout the world. As a United States based organization, we owe a particular responsibility to name and challenge US human rights violations alongside those of nations worldwide.

The US is an Empire, ruling over, occupying, unlawfully exploiting, and engaging in the slow genocide and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous First Nations and peoples. These Indigenous First Nations and peoples are and have long been engaged in struggles for national liberation from the Empire’s colonial rule. Colonialism and racism are not only events but structures, systemic and institutionalized by the colonial power, including the US in Federal Indian law and its other laws as they pertain to Indigenous peoples.

Colonialism, including settler colonialism and colonial occupation and rule, and state racism, have been condemned by the community of nations in the Charter of the United Nations of 1945, the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism of 1969 (signed and ratified by the United States), and UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 1960 which have condemned both colonialism and racism as violations of fundamental law and called for state responsibility in the immediate global eradication of colonialism and racism in all their “forms and manifestations.” The Charter itself declares as fundamental the “equality of all peoples and nations, large and small.” The UN General Assembly Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 (which the United States has signed) clearly and unequivocally declares that Indigenous “peoples” are equal to all other peoples of the world and possessed of all rights of all other peoples, including the collective human right to self-determination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (signed and ratified by the US) guarantees the

collective right in all nations and peoples to the exercise of full and free self-determination. The UN has condemned the state failures to conform with these fundamental principles of international, humanitarian, and human rights law and called for the immediate eradication of colonialism in all forms and manifestations by all states. The collective rights of Indigenous peoples to full and free self-determination and to be free of racial and ethnic oppression are *jus cogens* norms which are peremptory norms, to which no state may derogate.

We have a responsibility to do anti-colonialism work in solidarity with Indigenous liberation struggles. The law of colonialism and occupation, state lawfare, while at times a useful tool, is a weapon of war and state violence, genocide, including culturecide / ethnocide, religicide, linguicide, and ethnic cleansing, imperialism and plutocracy, white supremacy and racial discrimination, Western cultural and religious superiority, cisheteropatriarchy, state theft of Indigenous territory, lands, and resources, predatory capitalism and economic oppression, mass incarceration, rape, theft of children, authoritarianism, and ecological desecration. As we enter the UN's Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, our mission requires us to reject colonialism and colonial law. It also requires us to question systemic and institutionalized colonial and racist influence on our society, governance, and organizational culture and practices. It further requires us to support restorative justice, including reparations, of the Indigenous nations and peoples victimized by imperial, colonial, and racist rule.

We celebrate that practicing anti-colonialism and anti-racism requires us to commit to ways of being and frameworks that may be currently unfamiliar and challenging to us. We must consistently and repeatedly identify the ways that we are perpetuating colonialism and racism, learn anti-colonial and anti-racist ways, and then, most importantly, take action.

To this end, we will:

- Follow leaders of Indigenous and other occupied communities with humility, within and outside of our organization, taking care to respect the plurality of leaders, cultures and world views, and practices that may vary by context.
- Oppose the US Empire and colonialism wherever it exists in all its forms and manifestations by prioritizing anti-colonialism and anti-racism in our programming, practices, and organizational vision.
- Begin repairing our relationships with peoples, creatures, and ecosystems harmed by our organizational participation in colonialism and racism.
- Persist in working toward a future where the sacred no longer needs defending from Empire, colonialism, and racism.

Long-term implementation of this resolution is our collective and continuous responsibility. Because Indigenous liberation struggles are many and change over time, and because local

organizing needs differ, NLG must remain willing to expand our knowledge and practices beyond what is written in this document or known to its drafters.

In the short-term, proponents of this resolution plan to host an anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and Indigenous liberation and sovereignty working group for NLG members to engage one another in a process of restorative justice by identifying, committing to, and implementing actions required to fully realize the anti-colonial and anti-racist intentions behind this resolution. Considerations for the working group will include but not be limited to how NLG can strategize together with the leadership of Indigenous liberation movements to take meaningful action and provide support to those movements.