



Pacific Conference of Churches

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DELIVERY TEXT

Oral Statement on the ‘Question of New Caledonia’ to the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples United Nations Headquarters ¹

**By Rev. James Shri Bhagwan, General Secretary – Pacific Conference of Churches
15 June 2026**

The Chair, members of this Special Committee, petitioners and observers,

I greet you in the name of the Triune God on behalf of the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Regional NGO Alliance.

I come before you again on the Question of New Caledonia, in solidarity with the people of Kanaky and our member church, the Église Protestante de Kanaky Nouvelle-Calédonie.

In 2024, we warned that France could no longer be regarded as a neutral administrator of Kanaky’s decolonisation. The Pacific Peoples’ Mission to Kanaky New Caledonia², conducted in April 2025, confirms that the violence of May 2024 emerged from an unfinished and flawed decolonisation process, deep inequality, unfulfilled rebalancing commitments and repeated breaches of trust.

The Mission also witnessed how women, customary leaders, churches and young people restored calm, shared food, reopened local markets and held communities together, showing that peace in Kanaky is already being woven from within and cannot be imposed from Paris.

Recent United Nations findings reinforce this Pacific evidence. The Human Rights Committee found that the circumstances of the 2021 referendum denied the Kanak people the opportunity to give free, prior and informed consent. The Committee against Torture raised concerns over excessive and lethal force, arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and the transfer of Kanak detainees to European France. General Assembly resolution

¹See Full Statement in Appendix 1.

² See Report in Appendix 2.

80/98 reaffirmed the right to self-determination and continuing United Nations responsibility. On 7 May 2026, CERD warned that France risks undermining Kanak self-determination and called for effective participation and free, prior and informed consent.

These findings cannot remain in separate United Nations files. The C24 and Fourth Committee must integrate them into their working papers, recommendations and resolutions.

But institutional coherence must lead to action. Less than five years remain in this Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. This Committee must ask whether annual consideration without a visiting mission, measurable benchmarks or a decolonisation timetable is advancing freedom, or merely managing delay. Kanaky must not be carried unfinished into another decade.

The dismissal of charges against Christian Téin and 13 others raises grave questions about their arrest, transfer and prolonged separation from their people. Elections cannot substitute for decolonisation while the foundational political wound remains open.

With provincial elections approaching, the United Nations must urgently assess the electoral environment and ensure that the poll is not used to normalise an unresolved colonial situation, but forms part of a credible and freely negotiated pathway to self-determination.

We therefore call upon this Committee to:

- **Accept the Pacific Peoples' Mission report;**
- **Urgently dispatch a joint C24 and Melanesian Spearhead Group mission;**
- **Deploy a United Nations electoral assessment mission;**
- **Call for the release of Kanak political prisoners and the return to Kanaky of detainees transferred to European France; and**
- **Establish a clear decolonisation timetable, respecting the Nouméa Accord and Kanak customary institutions.**

At a time when multilateralism is under threat, the United Nations must show that its findings carry consequence and that its promise to colonised peoples is more than an annual resolution. Kanaky is not France's Pacific possession. Kanaky is our Pacific neighbour and family. Its future must be freely chosen by its people.

Oleti Atrqatr. Thank you.



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APPENDIX 1

Full Statement on the ‘Question of New Caledonia’ to the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples United Nations Headquarters

The Chair and members of this august Committee,

I greet you from the Pasifika Household of God.

The Pacific Conference of Churches, as a member of the Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Organisation Alliance, submits this statement in solidarity with the people of Kanaky New Caledonia, the Église Protestante de Kanaky Nouvelle-Calédonie and communities carrying an unfinished decolonisation process.

In 2024, I conveyed the concern of Pacific churches and civil society that France could no longer be regarded as a neutral and trustworthy administrator of Kanaky’s decolonisation. We warned that unilateral changes to the provincial electoral roll, after the deeply contested third referendum, would reverse rather than advance self-determination. We called for imposed pathways to cease, neutral mediation, trauma healing and community dialogue.

The Pacific Peoples’ Mission to Kanaky New Caledonia, conducted in April 2025 and launched in November, listened to customary authorities, women, youth, churches and communities affected by the events of May 2024.

It found that the crisis was not an isolated collapse of public order. It emerged from an unfinished and flawed decolonisation process, inequality, unfulfilled rebalancing commitments and repeated breaches of trust. Kanak grievances concerning land, education, employment, health, political participation and economic power remain unresolved.

The Mission also witnessed how women, customary leaders, churches and young people restored calm, shared food, reopened local markets and held communities

together—showing that peace in Kanaky is already being woven from within and cannot be imposed from Paris.

With provincial elections approaching, the United Nations must urgently assess the electoral environment and ensure that the poll is not used to normalise an unresolved colonial situation, but forms part of a credible and freely negotiated pathway to self-determination.

An electoral roll is never merely technical in a colonised territory. It determines whether the Indigenous people can exercise self-determination without their political voice being diluted.

Recent findings across the United Nations system reinforce what Pacific communities have said. In December 2024, the Human Rights Committee found that the circumstances of the 2021 referendum denied the Kanak people the opportunity to give free, prior and informed consent. It called on France to facilitate self-determination, cooperate with this Special Committee, consult Indigenous Peoples before measures affecting the process, and uphold the irreversibility of the Nouméa Accord. (CCPR/C/FRA/CO/6, paras. 4–5.)

In May 2025, the Committee against Torture expressed concern over allegations of excessive and lethal force, arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment; prison overcrowding and Indigenous overrepresentation; and the non-consensual transfer of Kanak detainees to European France. It called for investigations, accountability and reparation, an end to such transfers, and respect for family and community ties. (CAT/C/FRA/CO/8, paras. 30–31.)

On 5 December 2025, the General Assembly adopted resolution 80/98 without a vote, reaffirming the right of the people of New Caledonia to self-determination and the continuing responsibility of the United Nations.

On 7 May 2026, CERD acted through its Early Warning and Urgent Action Procedure. It warned that France risks undermining Kanak self-determination and called for effective Kanak participation, consultation with representative and customary institutions, and free, prior and informed consent before political, electoral or constitutional measures proceed.

These are not findings outside the decolonisation process. Article 15 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination enables CERD to consider information concerning Non-Self-Governing Territories and submit recommendations to the General Assembly. The C24 itself reported in 2025 that it continued to monitor related developments with regard to Article 15.

The C24 and Fourth Committee must therefore not work in a silo. Self-determination, freedom from racial discrimination, protection from ill-treatment, political participation and Indigenous rights are interdependent. Findings of treaty bodies, Human Rights Council Special Procedures and other United Nations mechanisms should inform the

C24 working paper, recommendations and Fourth Committee resolution on New Caledonia. The United Nations must act as one system.

Yet institutional coherence without action is insufficient. The Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism runs from 2021 to 2030. We are beyond its halfway point, with fewer than five years remaining. The Committee must honestly assess its approach to Kanaky.

Has annual consideration and repeated language produced measurable progress towards self-determination?

Where is the visiting mission?
Where are the benchmarks?

Where is the timetable?

Kanaky must not be carried unfinished from one International Decade into another. Decolonisation cannot mean the indefinite management of a colonial question. The credibility of the C24 rests not only on keeping territories on a list, but on using its mandate to move them towards a freely chosen political status.

The dismissal of charges against FLNKS President Christian Téin and 13 others for insufficient evidence raises grave questions about their arrest, transfer to European France and prolonged separation from their people. While noting the prosecution's appeal, trust cannot be rebuilt through punishment first and evidence later.

We also draw attention to the provincial elections scheduled for 28 June 2026. Electoral changes adopted only weeks before the poll and outside a comprehensive political settlement risk further destabilising trust. Elections cannot substitute for decolonisation while the foundational political wound remains open.

The Mission also records resilience. Women, customary leaders, churches and youth restored calm and held communities together. Kanaky is a place of wisdom, dignity and capacity. A just pathway must rise from within.

We therefore call upon this Committee to:

- Accept the Pacific Peoples' Mission report;
- Urgently dispatch a joint C24 and Melanesian Spearhead Group mission;
- Deploy a United Nations electoral assessment mission;
- Call for the release of Kanak political prisoners and the return to Kanaky of detainees transferred to European France; and

- Establish a clear decolonisation timetable, respecting the Nouméa Accord and Kanak customary institutions.

We further call for recent United Nations human rights findings to be integrated into the C24 working paper, recommendations and Fourth Committee resolution, and for neutral mediation, trauma healing and community peacebuilding.

At a time when multilateralism is under threat, the United Nations must show that its findings carry consequence and its promises to colonised peoples are honoured through action. Institutional coherence and measurable progress are tests of its credibility.

Peace cannot be built by force. It must be woven through justice. Order without justice is not peace; silence under pressure is not consent. Kanaky is not France's Pacific possession. Kanaky is part of our oceanic family. Its future must be freely chosen by its people.

May this Committee act with courage, so that the children of Kanaky inherit not another delayed accord, but a future freely chosen in dignity.

We pray for God's guidance upon this Committee, for justice and for life in its fullness.

Oleti Atrqatr. Thank you.



Rev. James Shri Bhagwan
General Secretary, Pacific Conference of Churches
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APPENDIX 2

REPORT OF THE “PEOPLES’ MISSION TO KANAKY” IS ATTACHED