



Pacific Conference of Churches

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PACIFIC CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES STATEMENT TO THE UN SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF 24, ON THE QUESTION ON NEW CALEDONIA

Dear Madam chair, excellencies,

The Pacific Conference of Churches notes with concern that the third and final independence referendum under the Noumea Accord was not conducted in the true spirit of the Accord and under conditions that ensured transparency, fairness and legitimacy.

We decry the manner in which France scheduled New Caledonia's third independence referendum for 12th December 2021, instead of keeping to a timeframe that allowed for the referendum to be held at any time to November, 2022.

The appeals by the pro-Independence parties and movements, as well as the Church highlight clearly how the pandemic and related COVID-19 protocols particularly affected indigenous Kanaks, grieving over fatalities in their families and upset by the disruption of customary mourning ceremonies. Their appeals to postpone the third referendum were echoed by the Member States of the Melanesian Spearhead Group¹, former Pacific Island leaders², Pacific Churches and Civil Society³ as well as the World Council of Churches.⁴

France's inflexible and inconsiderate approach in this regard, can be seen as deliberately undermining this referendum, particularly as the previous 2 referendums saw a growing number of voters wanting independence.

As expected, with health restrictions in place, and the limited timeframe, Kanaks were especially impeded in registering for the vote, mobilising their communities and campaigning in preparation for the referendum.

As a result, the will of the Kanak people was not able to be fully or fairly represented in this final referendum. This led to the non-participation by 56.13% of the 184,364 registered voters.

The Pacific Island Forum observers of the referendum noted that, "The spirit in which the referendum was conducted weighs heavily on the Noumea Accord and New Caledonia's

¹ <https://pina.com.fj/2021/12/10/date-for-final-referendum-in-new-caledonia-not-free-or-fair-msg/>

² <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/new-caledonia-referendum-3/>

³ <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO2112/S00095/pacific-ngos-and-movements-call-on-france-to-defer-referendum-vote-to-2022.htm>

⁴ <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-urges-postponing-third-referendum-on-independence-of-kanaky-new-caledonia-people>

self-determination process. Civic participation is an integral component of any democracy and critical to the interpretation and implications of this third referendum.”⁵

It should also be noted that Kanaks who took a non-participation stance to the referendum, did so peacefully.

The Pacific Conference of Churches and regional civil society support the call by the Melanesian Spearhead Group, comprising the states of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia, that the United Nations declare this third referendum null and void due to the ‘non-participation’ of the people of Kanaky New Caledonia.

It has no moral or political legitimacy without the full participation the colonised people who have the right to self-determination.

Oleti, thank You Madam Chair.



Rev. James Bhagwan
General Secretary

⁵ <https://fijisun.com.fj/2021/12/14/pacific-islands-forum-ministerial-committee-2021-new-caledonia-referendum-on-independence/>