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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vatican repudiates “Doctrine of Discovery” in favor of Human Rights

From the Pawnee Business Council

PAWNEE NATION- Friday, April 21, 2023-- On March 30, 2023, the Vatican issued a historic announcement repudiating the long-standing Doctrine of Discovery. That mediaeval legal Doctrine originated from Catholic edicts in the 1400’s. It became part of early international law and was used by European kingdoms over the next 500 years to colonize the world. Used in colonies around the world, the Doctrine was adopted into early U.S. law as a legal basis for colonizing North America, appropriating Indian land, and subjugating Indigenous Nations.

After rejecting the Doctrine as unjust, the announcement states that Pope Francis strongly supports “the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” According to the Vatican:

“The implementation of those principles would improve the living conditions and help protect the rights of Indigenous peoples as well as facilitate their development in a way that respects their identity, language, and culture.”

With that endorsement, the Pope and Catholic Church join efforts by more than 140 nations to restore human rights of Indigenous peoples.

The Doctrine of Discovery was introduced into American law in the 1823 Supreme Court case *Johnson v. McIntosh*. The Doctrine quickly became a cornerstone of Federal Indian Law to sanction U.S. treatment of American Indians during the colonization of their lands and subjugation of their Nations. Many legal scholars see *Johnson v. McIntosh* as a miscarriage of justice, but the case has never been overturned and is still used today by the Supreme Court to decide cases affecting Indian Country.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) commended Pope Francis for the new Catholic policy. Here in Oklahoma, Pawnee Nation Councilwoman Dawna Hare, who teaches Native American Studies at OSU and chairs the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, lauded the new Vatican policy:

“The Pawnee Nation is an NCIA member. Our Intergovernmental Affairs Committee hopes the Vatican announcement encourages Federal courts to discard the Doctrine of Discovery. It is time to lay it to rest.”

As a long-time practitioner of Federal Indian Law, Pawnee Nation President Echo-Hawk added: “the Vatican’s repudiation of that unjust legal doctrine will no doubt exert strong moral influence in North America. Federal courts should pay heed and at long last do the same thing.”

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For more information, press only:

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About the Pawnee Nation- The Pawnee Nation has a long and proud history spanning time immemorial. Early in the 18th century, more than 60,000 members of the Pawnee Nation inhabited the area along the North Platt River in Nebraska. The Pawnee then and now are composed of four distinct bands: the Chaui “Grand,” the Kitkehahki “Republican,” the Pitahawirata “Tappage” and the Skidi “Wolf” and a unique and traditional government comprised of traditional Nasharos (Chiefs) and an elected Pawnee Business Council. Today, the Pawnee Nation is the largest and most successful employer in Pawnee County and has a long history of providing valuable quality of life and lifesaving opportunities and services to constituents and Pawnee people in the direct service area. Pawnee Nation enterprise has successfully contributed to multi-million-dollar improvements and expansion of healthcare, education, infrastructure, social services, and law enforcement for Pawnee people, constituents, and partners.