

The Longest Walk Statement (1978)

We are the sovereign and free children of Mother Earth. Since before human memory, our people have lived on this land. For countless generations, we have lived in harmony with our relatives, the four-leggeds, the winged beings, the beings that swim and the beings that crawl. For all time our home is from coast to coast; from pole to pole. We are the original people of this hemisphere. The remains of our ancestors and of our many relatives are a greater part of this land and any other's remains. The mountains and the trees are a part of us—we are flesh of their flesh. We are the Human Beings of many nations, and we still speak many tongues. We have come from the four directions of this Turtle Island. Our feet have traveled our Mother Earth over many thousands of miles. We are the evidence of the Western Hemisphere, the carriers of the original ways of this area of the world, and the protectors of all Life [on] this Turtle Island.

Today we address you in the language of the oppressor, but the concepts predate the coming of the invaders. The injustice we speak of is centuries old, and has been spoken against in many tongues. We are still the original people of this land. We are the people of The Longest Walk.

For many generations we have been seeking justice and peace from the European refugees and their descendants who have settled on our sacred Turtle Island. It has been an incredibly long struggle. We have entered into many agreements for peace and friendship with the governments of these people, and yet we have received neither peace nor friendship. Most of our original homelands have been illegally taken from us. Our people have been, and continue to be, mercilessly hunted and slaughtered to serve the needs of corporations, governments, and their agents.

Today, the conditions in Central and South America are identical to the conditions in this country during the 19th Century. The process of annihilation and destruction are carried on with money, sophisticated weapons, missionaries, widespread sterilization, so-called developmental programs, CIA and FBI organized training of terrorists and provocateurs that are sponsored and provided by the United States. We can find no other words for the description of these acts other than murder and terrorism. This process is hidden from the peoples of the world by a conscious suppression of information coming from the offending countries.

Our people are often forced to leave their beloved homelands and are sent to lands where they greatly suffer. Our grandfathers and grandmothers were forced to walk

many times in front of the guns of the invaders. Today we have been forced to walk again, in front of guns and the threat of destruction that comes from words in legislation.

. . .

We know that the present attacks on our lands and sovereignty will, unless halted, ultimately benefit the interest of corporations which seek coal, uranium, water and other parts of our Mother Earth. We understand that the attack on our existence originates with these interests. The land speculators of the last century have been replaced by the oil refineries and the ore processors of this century. The United States government failed to protect our interests against land speculators, who were far less powerful than the transnational corporations we face today. The present-day racism against our people is fueled by these organizations, and the denial of our rights will open up our air, water and lands to a ruthless exploitation unparalleled in history. Uncontrolled Western development will destroy our ways of life, and will threaten all life on this Turtle Island.

The Creator gave to us our original instructions, telling us how to walk about on this Earth as protectors and relatives to all life. As long as the sun rises, the grasses grow, and the cycles continue, we are to carry on this duty. Around us live a people who act in a way that will bring about the total destruction of all life. The transnational corporations destroy life in the waters, air, and land. Huge trawlers attack our relatives in the sea, giant machineries strip our Mother Earth's skin bare, factories and vehicles filled the sky with tons of poison. The recent rush to use nuclear power poses the most potent threat to ending all life in one generation.

. . . How do we explain to the American people that we love our Mother Earth and ways of life? How can we state that we do not need the United States government to tell us how to be indigenous people? What will it take to convince the U.S. government to allow us to live in peace? How do we convince the US government to simply leave us alone to live according to our ways of life?

The federal system has tried many programs for the so-called improvement of our lives. There have been an endless procession of such programs: the BIA, the Dawes Act, the 1924 Citizenship Act, the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, the Indian Claims Commission, Termination, Relocation, Self-determination, Housing, and on and on. Our conditions have not improved.

There are those of our people who have been destroyed by words and promises of a better way of life through the American system. The American government chooses to see them as leaders of indigenous people. They form corporations and committees. But a corporation is not a nation!

On many of our territories, we are subjected to governments created under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which fosters dissidents who are willing to sell out for an American sanctioned position. . . . From the beginning these puppet governments have brought the wishes of the federal government to the indigenous people. They have never been able to effectively bring the wishes of the indigenous people to Washington. These governments are the clearest manifestation of federal policy in the indigenous communities. They do not, and cannot, effectively represent the people. They represent a policy which, when advocated by indigenous individuals, presents what can best be described as a kind of self-destruction. . . .

In order for our people to be happy, healthy, and productive, we must have access to all of our relatives and the self-esteem, respect, affection, and a sense of belonging we receive from them. There are many policies and regulations that remove our many relatives from us. Our relatives in the waters are being removed by millions of sports fishermen and commercial fishing fleets. Our relatives, the four-legged creatures, are being hunted, trapped, slaughtered, driven away, and forced into extinction. Our relatives in the sky are faced with the same problems and have the same threats upon them. This indiscriminate barbarism is beyond the reason of our people. Our people only took the lives of those other beings when it was necessary for our survival and not the mere "sport" of it. Our Grandmother, the Moon, has been molested and a part of her being has been removed. . . .

Our cultures are structured for Human Beings. They are based on principles of respect and responsibility for everyone and everything. The manner in which the people are to live is described to the people through our religious teachings. These religious teachings were given to the Creation by the Creator in order to insure our existence in this world. To remove our children from our communities, and to deny them access to these original instructions leads to the collapse of our families, societies, and nations. It is our commitment to reverse this process and rebuild our country.

We understand that self-esteem derives from the things that people do every day. Our elder people teach a respect for one another and the respect for all the things of this place, including Mother Earth, the Grasses, the Waters, and the many things which support our lives. We have a high regard for the affection of our people. In our ways, we are taught our relationship to the generations yet unborn, to those who have gone before us, and to our nations of people. We are deeply rooted in the land and our peoples' roots draw sustenance from our Mother Earth. We, the traditional people, are instructed in the old ways and every day we still live these instructions.

. . . The occupiers' borders defining the settler regimes of Mexico, the United States, and Canada, divide our territories and peoples. Each of these regions seeks to impose

fake identities of being Mexican, American, or Canadian. Border policies inhibit the free flow of the members of our nations and break up the cultural continuity and integrity of our peoples. The national laws of these regimes function uniformly toward the destruction and exploitation of our peoples. Land laws in Mexico force our people from their lands, and force them northward to seek survival. The immigration laws of the United States deny entrance to the indigenous people coming from Mexico. Yet these same laws are distorted to allow for a legalized kidnapping of our children from the Canadian area. Throughout the hemisphere, immigration laws have historically been used to bring in large groups of immigrants to further the colonization and destruction of our Mother Earth and People. Since those immigrants are coming to this hemisphere to occupy our lands, we are asserting our right to determine who enters our lands and we are asserting our right to deport those people who we determine to be illegal aliens.

. . . Your laws were made to protect not your people, but the greed of the wealthy. So there is no respect in your laws and no justice in your courts. We do not recognize your self-appointed control over our lives and freedom.

As a people we have the right to gather together to give a greeting and a thanksgiving to the Creation. We have the right to live in peace and tranquility. We have the right to the fruits of our own lands and to feed, shelter and clothe our people. We have a right to conceive and to give birth according to our natural ways. We have the right to educate our children to our ways of life. We have the right to protect ourselves and our lands against abuses and to settle disputes that arise within our own territories. We have the right to clean air, clean water, and the peaceful usage of our lands. We have the right to be a people. These are inherent rights. All people possess these rights under the laws of the Universe as well as man-made laws. These are rights that cannot be given to or denied by one group of people over another. As the traditional people, we recognize and understand that these rights came from the Creator and not by actions of humans.

The United States has claimed to confer U.S. citizenship upon our people. Even that act has been used as a weapon against our people. It may be true that the United States has the power to confer citizenship upon whomever seeks it, but it has no right to deny our citizenship to our own nations. Today it comes to our ears that we are "privileged citizens" and that the treaties should be "abrogated" in order that we may be made equal to United States citizens.

We are not United States citizens. We have treaties with the United States, and the U.S. does not make treaties with its own citizens. We protested the 1924 Citizenship Act. We do not claim U.S. citizenship. Nothing the US has done in its relations with us has moved us to want to change that position. . . .

We call for the restoration of all lands illegally removed from our protection. We call for the payment of war reparations due to us for the reconstruction of our nations. We call for an end to the confusing situation regarding state and federal jurisdiction, and we direct America's attention to our treaties and agreements which defined the relationship of our countries. We call upon organized religion to become allies in the process of liberation, and to stop their competition for our "souls." We are here to make it clear to the American government and the people of the world that there is only one definition of who we are as a people. That definition arises from our religions, governments, and the ways of life that we follow. No one else on the Mother Earth has the right to attempt to define us or our existence. . . .