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Message from Leonard Peltier: 'Remember the people who stood up and fought'

written by Leonard Peltier
June 26, 2019



Participants in the annual Freedom Run, part of the Leonard Peltier Day commemoration. Photo: International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee

On June 26, 1975, the FBI raided the Jumping Bull compound at Pine Ridge Reservation in Oglala, S.D. Native American activist Joe Stuntz and two FBI agents died in the firefight. American Indian Movement warrior Leonard Peltier was framed up by the FBI and continues to be imprisoned.

Below is Peltier's message to this year's #LeonardPeltierDay commemoration, held annually since 1999 on the anniversary of Pine Ridge events. Every day needs to be

Leonard Peltier Day until he is free.

Hau Mi Kolas!

Welcome to the 20th Annual Commemoration! First, let me recognize and thank the Commemoration Committee for organizing this annual event for the past 20 years. Thanks to all, I commend you for all your hard work and dedication. I know it is due to the love of our people that you have done such an awesome job. I know that every year it's a struggle, but you so generously give of yourself and make it look easy. Again, I thank all of you.

In my mind, I can see you all gathered under the shade, visiting with each other, some exhausted from the walk, some catching up on the latest gossip from the past year! Through it all, I hope everyone is doing okay, the adults and children are well and especially the Elders.

With news of the bad weather, I worry about your safety. I know there are parts of the United States that have been struck by tornadoes and hurricanes, causing horrible damage. Some communities looked like they were hit with bombs. Unfortunately, some people lost everything, including some lives. I spoke with Chase Iron Eyes and Eileen Janis after hearing of all the flooding, but it was too early to tell how much damage was done. At that time, they didn't know if any lives had been lost but knew all of the main roads were under water, with some areas unreachable where a lot of the people live. They said the phones were out in some areas so they couldn't call. All we were able to do is pray and ask people who were able to help.

I felt bad because being locked in a prison cell, all I could do was pray. For those of you who remember, you know I would have been one of the first ones in there, doing whatever I could do, even if it was just ordering the younger guys. You know, all joking aside, I would have been there, helping! We know prayer isn't enough to rebuild our communities, we have to unite and work as one. That's the only way.

I haven't heard anything from my grandchildren. Is their home okay and are they okay? Maybe somebody can let me know.

While I have your attention, I want to send out a huge thank you to the many young people who are supporting this commemoration. As adults and grandparents, we can NEVER allow our history to die. Also, to the Elders who were so much a part of the struggle but have passed on, who were only guilty of being Lakota and were wanting what was promised to our ancestors, we give them a big shout out! They faced down fear and were willing to give their freedom or their lives because of the great love for you and our future generations. The Elders of my generation did the same for us. We will never forget the courage our people had in fighting against the greatest odds in the history of the world for us, the Native people and our freedoms. We remember them ALWAYS in our prayers and in our songs.

Please remember, even though some have passed many decades or centuries ago, their spirit is with us. When you mention them in your songs and prayers, they will respond to you in your dreams. Crazy Horse, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Tecumseh, Chief Seattle, Dragging Canoe! Remember them when you are in ceremonies or sitting in the inipi. My Elders told me, don't ever forget our culture or our people who have passed on. Remember the people who stood up in the 60's and 70's and fought the government attempt to terminate us. Our people stood up to regain sovereign rights and to honor our treaties. The courage it took was no different than what was fought in the past. We were able to stop termination but the battle continues.

I'm also hearing some good things. I heard that in 2018, more Native students graduated from high school than any other time in history! Also 2019 was a record-breaking year for Native students enrolled in colleges! We all know, our future battles will be fought with the pen and in the courts, so we need to be prepared! Our Warriors are going to look just a little bit different, wearing their degrees! Our

ancestors have not sacrificed in vain!

But we still have a lot of problems to solve. I'm hearing our communities are being infested with drug users and abusers. I can't stand the thought of our little babies being hurt by parents so drugged up, they don't even know what they are doing. Some of these babies go to bed with their little bellies empty, some get molested or sexually assaulted because the parents are too busy looking for their next high and not taking care of their children. Some of these kids take their own lives, rather than continue to live like this.

We have to remember that children are the most sacred gift Wakan Tanka has given us and yet some of them are treated so badly. We as Native people MUST find a way to stop this! We are better than that and we are stronger than that. We have to be stronger than ever because this drug problem is destroying our families and our communities. We have to unite to stop this enemy, our babies are counting on us!

I'm not trying to be depressing, I'm trying to light a fire in all of the Warriors gathered here today. We can't wait for someone to solve our problems. We have work to do, let's get at it!

I'm going to sign off now, I know you all want to eat and enjoy the day visiting with each other. Thank all of you for being here, for those of you who walked, those of you making sure everyone had water, those of you driving cars and those leading the way to the Jumping Bull homestead. To the cooks, thank you, I'm sure everything was real tasty! Thank you for letting me have a part of this day.

Doksha,
In the Spirit of Crazy Horse,
Leonard Peltier



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