



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

# **National Day of Mourning 2022: From Landback to bodily autonomy, Indigenous leadership is key**

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November 29, 2022



Indigenous people and supporters march through Plymouth, Massachusetts, on Nov. 24. Photo: Rachel Jones / UAINÉ

*Opening remarks at the 2022 National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on Nov. 24. Since 1970, Indigenous people and their allies have gathered at noon on Cole's Hill to commemorate a National Day of Mourning on the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday. This year more than 2,000 people attended – the largest group ever.*

Greetings to everyone here with us today and to everyone listening via our livestream. This crowd is amazing! There are people from lots of different Indigenous Nations, and it gives us strength to be together today. Haitian and Palestinian community, Taino, Black, Asian, South Asian, Latino and white — I love looking out every year and seeing everyone together in solidarity with Indigenous

struggles.

People yearn to be in relation with each other and with the earth, and that is what we need in order to address the destructive systems that are hurting so many of us. At the United American Indians of New England (UAIINE), we have long believed that our liberation is intertwined with the liberation of others.

Welcome Deaf community. Thanks to our ASL interpreters and Sunny Singh from hate5six for live streaming. We also send hearts to our kitchen crew, our sound crew and all the artists who worked on restoring some of our banners. Shout-out too to the Starbucks and other workers here who have been fighting hard to unionize their workplaces.

Reminder: COVID, flu and RSV are all around, and we don't want anyone here to get sick. Masks up! Mayflowers down!

We have a lot of positive things happening in our communities, but this "thankstaking day" is a day of mourning. We start out by acknowledging that a lot of people listening today are feeling pain from the violence that their communities are experiencing. In particular, we embrace and are part of the LGBTQ2S and trans communities that are so under attack and are grieving the loss of family at Club Q in Colorado.

### **Frontlines of climate crisis**

Some of our speakers today are Indigenous people whose nations are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, as are Indigenous peoples on multiple continents, suffering from floods, extreme heat, melting, the impact on fish and animals and plants. Land bases are disappearing and traditional cultural practices are being devastated by this.

Despite this happening, climate conferences such as COP27 continue to have way

too much useless talk without the necessary commitment and immediate action required to properly address what is happening, and they continue to largely exclude Indigenous people and voices.

Everywhere, Indigenous peoples are resisting megadams, lithium mines, copper mines, coal mines, gold mines, oil and gas pipelines, fracking and so many other destructive projects. Many Native communities do not have safe drinking water, often due to industrial and military pollution.

So we say today: Hands off our land and water! Stop destroying our planet!



Mahtowin Munro. Photo: Rachel Jones / UAINÉ

## **Attacks on ICWA**

Right now, many of us Native people in this country – really all of us – are closely watching the attacks on the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which is intended to protect Indigenous children from being removed from their communities.

The ICWA appeal in the Supreme Court is backed by energy companies and evangelicals. They are viciously attacking Indigenous sovereignty, our nations and our families in an effort to steal more Indigenous land and return to the days when about a third of Indigenous children were taken away from their homes and tribal communities to be adopted into non-Native families.

Along with concerns about ICWA is the blunt fact that Native children are at least 4 times more likely to be in foster care in the U.S., with those numbers even higher in some areas.

We continue to join with those demanding the identification and return of the remains of thousands of Indigenous children who died at the residential schools and boarding schools sponsored by Canada and the U.S. in order to “kill the Indian” in the child and destroy Indigenous communities. Bring our children home!

So we say today: Hands off our children!

### **Bodily autonomy and MMIWG2S (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit)**

We acknowledge that the current widespread attacks on reproductive rights affect all potential child-bearers. We also point out that a reproductive rights crisis has existed for decades for Indigenous women, long before the overturn of Roe v. Wade.

That crisis includes a lack of support to be able to bear and bring up children with decent food and housing and without having them stolen by settler agencies, the need for free and safe abortions, and we cannot forget the former government practice of sterilizing Indigenous women and girls without consent, something that

is still known to happen in Canada.

We point out that violence against Indigenous women, girls and two spirits is rampant, the very highest rates. Our relatives continue to be stolen from us and killed, including right here in Massachusetts.

So we say today: Hands and laws off our bodies!

Museums and other institutions around the country, from Harvard to Berkeley, continue to hold onto our ancestors, by which I mean skeletal remains, skulls, hair, funerary items and more. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act needs to be strengthened, and all of our ancestors returned now. We cannot rest until that happens.

So we say today: Hands off our ancestors!

### **Solidarity with migrants**

Year after year, we stand on this hill and demand an end to the colonial borders, that ICE be abolished, and that Customs and Border Patrol stop detaining undocumented migrants. We think not only of the tribal nations whose homelands have been divided by the arbitrary settler-colonial border, but also of the many thousands of Indigenous people impacted by the U.S. policies that have led them to flee their home countries, and the Haitian and other relatives who are denied entry or deported by border control.

So we say today: Hands off our relatives!

There are many important struggles happening right now that we don't have time to touch upon. So I ask that you spend some time after today following UAINÉ and other Indigenous-led organizations on social media, and also start reading Indigenous media, to learn more about Indigenous movements here and

internationally and what you can do to support them.

## **Landback**

Everywhere, there are calls for Landback and reparations.

Our ancestors always taught us to demand the return of our lands – it is not a new idea. The land and water are in our blood and bones, part of our bodies, and we have never forgotten that.

Ensuring that Indigenous peoples around the world can manage land and water is documented to be much better for the earth. As part of urgently needed FIRST steps to achieve justice and address climate change, let's ensure that no projects can go through any Indigenous nation's land without free, prior and authentic informed consent. It's time to cancel the leases, the pipelines, the mining and the corporate contracts and start over.

Take all of the land that is currently being mismanaged by settler governments, such as the National Parks, and hand it over to Indigenous Nations to caretake that land. That would mean the restoration of millions of acres. It would also mean the end of the desecration of sacred sites such as the Black Hills. Landback needs to happen internationally.



