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Apache Stronghold Heads to the East

As the Apache Stronghold's prayer journey to the Supreme Court turns East, we are reflecting on our ceremonies and discussions throughout the western segment of the journey. Our prayer journey through the West began in the Lummi Nation, north of Seattle, where we met with the elders of the nations and were given words of encouragement and support. Adalitz, who leads the elder program for the Lummi Nation, spoke of the importance of this fight, saying it's crucial to set the precedence for the younger ones because it's the children who will be living in the world we are creating for them. Additionally, in Adalitz's words, "We're doing this to take care of the mind, body, and soul of our people because it's all timely. Our Mother Earth is dying, and she's upset, so let's take care of her and carry those words of protection, protection, protection, let her live, let us live, and that means for all people because mother nature keeps us all here."

On our next stop, we visited Peehee Mu'huh (Thacker Pass) a sacred site to the Paiute Shoshone people. When the Apache Stronghold arrived at the entrance to Peehee Mu'huh, they found a chain link wall with a locked gate, blocking everyone except those authorized by the mine. Speaking of the experience later, Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. shared, "It's a sad reminder that people don't know the day could come if Oak Flat is ever transferred to Resolution Copper, that the acorns, medicine plants, and water could be locked away behind a gate facing death at the hands of a corporation. People need to come together to stop this desecration happening at Peehee Mu'huh and prevent it from happening everywhere else before it's too late." We left with a reminder of the Indigenous people who were stewards of the land since time immemorial, and all others who would go there to pray, are now locked out. The continued genocide of Indigenous Religion reminds us of the reason why we are protecting sacred sites, Mother Earth, and our basic human rights.

In the Bay Area, we were welcomed with open arms to the sacred site of the Lisjan people. Corrina Gould, the leader of the Lisjan Nation, spoke about the history of the site. It was heartbreaking to learn that this sacred place, one of the oldest village and ancestral burial sites, was taken over due to corporate greed. After many years, the Lisjan people reclaimed their land through legal battles and by purchasing it back. This reminds us of a system that prioritizes colonial profit, first seizing the land and then forcing Indigenous people to buy back what was once their home. This is the essence of the struggle.

Dr. Nosie spoke about the ongoing legal battle against the United States and Resolution Copper (Rio Tinto and BHP). The Apache Stronghold court case centers on the spiritual connection to the land. As Indigenous people, our history and culture affirm this connection, but the United States demands that we prove it in court. Being required to justify our spiritual beliefs to God and Mother Earth exemplifies the continued genocide against Indigenous people and violates our human rights. This case challenges the United States to confront its history of wrongdoing against Indigenous people and all people. In support, Corrina Gould from the Confederated Villages of the Lisjan Nation stated "We need to protect the Apaches' sacred sites and all sacred sites that are connected to each other."

While in Los Angeles, the Apache Stronghold met with members of the LA Tenants Union and Unión de Vecinos, led by Kenia Alcocer, including a local chapter at Flower Drive, where tenants are fighting the Ellis Act. The Los Angeles Housing Department explains that the Ellis Act provides landlords

in California with a legal way to exit the rental market. However, according to the LA Tenants Union, it effectively allows landlords to evict tenants in rent-controlled units under the guise of "going out of business," circumventing rent control laws meant to protect affordable housing. Ines from Flower Drive stated, "When harassment fails to drive us out, Ellis evictions enable developers to mass evict and destroy rent-controlled housing. This is tearing our community apart and increasing homelessness. Landlords are banishing people to the streets. Mass deportation and trauma are leading to social breakdown, making us all less safe." Ines also spoke about the harsh realities faced by their neighborhood, where residents live on fixed, low incomes as prices rise not only for rent but also for food and other essentials. With no corresponding increase in income, survival becomes impossible.

The people of these organizations shared that their homes are their sacred places of prayer. Unión de Vecinos echoed this sentiment, adding, "We must protect what is sacred to us—our homes, families, communities, and Mother Earth—being destroyed by our government and corporations for greed and profit." We left LA with a deep understanding of the fight that affects non-tribal members of the United States. Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. reminded us that on reservations, although the U.S. government technically owns the land, the tribe holds a lease, providing some security. In contrast, residents in these neighborhoods can be turned out on the streets at any time, with nowhere to go. Tribal leadership can still assist its people if it chooses to. This visit underscores the interconnectedness of the struggles we all face, regardless of personal, economic, or social backgrounds. The Los Angeles Tenants Union and Unión de Vecinos organization and the Apache Stronghold stand in strong solidarity with one another in protecting our sacred places and the human rights of all people.

In Ft. Yuma, the Quechan Indian Tribe asked two young men from their community, Quinn and Garrison White, to join the Apache Stronghold on their journey to the Supreme Court. Councilman Zion White presented a letter to the Apache Stronghold stating "The Quechan Tribe stands in solidarity with the Apache Stronghold and all allied efforts to safeguard sacred lands from exploitation and desecration. Oak Flats is not only a heritage site for the Apache people but also a symbol of the broader struggle to protect indigenous lands and rights." Dr. Nosie shared how appreciative he is of the Quechan Tribe's aid in protecting Oak Flat which strengthens our communities together. He states that this is a huge milestone for us as this shows the importance of unifying together to protect Mother Earth and our human rights. We also want to thank those who we've prayed with and who are coming with us to the filling in Washington D.C.

After visiting the Quechan Indian Tribe, we met with Tucson, Phoenix Valley area, Apache Elders at Oak Flat, Flagstaff, and Hopi lands. Our stop in Tucson was hosted by the Shalom Mennonite Fellowship Church. This church has been a long-time supporter of the movement and is signed on an amicus brief to support the Indigenous religion legally, defending the spiritual connection Indigenous people have to Mother Earth. The Southside Presbyterian Church hosted the prayer gathering, where people of all backgrounds gathered to pray for the upcoming court case. While we were there, Pastor Tracy Howe announced that her church had signed an amicus brief to support the Apache Stronghold's court case against the United States and Resolution Copper (Rio Tinto and BHP). We are so grateful that we were welcomed by amazing people and treated with hospitality as we had at all our prior stops.

At each prayer gathering, there was a deep understanding that Mother Earth wasn't getting any healthier, and to protect her from further desecration. As we continue to stop across the country, we have been given support for our journey to the Supreme Court to stop the shattering of the Human Existence and to protect Mother Earth. As we move forward, we'll continue to address the support we need from the politicians, from the federal government to the state government and the tribal governments, to ensure that protecting water, the Earth, and the air we breathe is a priority. We encourage all leaders to stand with the other politicians and tribes who have already come forward to support the Apache Stronghold to protect the future of all people. Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr shares, "As a former tribal chairman, I'm really

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disappointed, because these political leaders know there is not enough. They know the Earth will be contaminated forever, and the destruction can never be fixed once it happens. I am calling on all leaders who have not yet made a stand, to make the right decision and join the others, to protect what is left for all creation."

In Phoenix, we gathered in the chapel at Brophy College Preparatory School, where multiple churches, Indigenous peoples, and the young students at Brophy blessed the Apache Stronghold for our journey to the Supreme Court. It was also shared that in 1928 when the Brophy Chapel was built, the Phoenix Indian School marching band played at the groundbreaking. However, almost 100 years later, Indigenous people sang their prayer songs and healed the past of our ancestors who were taken away from their families to be assimilated into forgetting their cultural ways. The Brophy Native American Club announced they will be there in Washington, DC on September 11th to stand in solidarity with the Apache Stronghold. Dr. Nosie was overjoyed by the news and reminded us that the young people are the ones who need to take action because this fight is going to keep going. Remember corporations are never going to stop on their own. In this long fight to stop the desecration of sacred sites and Mother Earth, we are reminded of the need to listen to the ones before us who've learned and done so much.

Apache Stronghold turned to the East on their journey, and their first stop was at Dził Chu (Big Mountain) also known as the San Francisco Peaks in Flagstaff, AZ. We gathered with organizations that protect the Indigenous peoples, including No Haul, Tó Nizhóní Aní ("Sacred Water Speaks"), Indigenous Circles of Flagstaff, 4th World Generations, Community Assistance Teams, the Flagstaff High School Native American Club, and Indigenous Ambassadors. We all had a mutual understanding of the fight to protect what's sacred for the people of this country. Each organization gave an update on its movements. It was a great time to catch up with our allies and pray for a safe journey for each other and their movements. The community of Flagstaff left us with this statement: "Lummi, Thacker Pass, Tohono O'odham, and the Fight that unifies all of our struggles, the land. Making their way to the United States Supreme Court, and challenging a case that impacts our spirituality, our ties to our sacred lands, and to the very foundations of our peoples. This is a fight our ancestors took upon their shoulders, to our elders and now to our generation and future ones after us. This fight is prevalent in each of the organizations present with Apache Stronghold, in prayer, ceremony, and community. Present in the very space that Flagstaff High School and the Native American Club made space for the San Francisco Peaks, Grand Canyon, and relatives most prone to the decision to be made September 11, 2024."

The Apache Stronghold was welcomed by the traditional Hopi community leaders of each mesa on their lands on August 17. It was an historic meeting, with discussions of our ancient religious ways and a shared understanding that we are all in the same fight together. The Hopi community showed us great hospitality, with a welcoming spirit the entire time we were there, and by nourishing us with a traditional meal for our journey forward. Each of the Hopi leaders, including a former tribal chairman, spoke about both history and the future, and they shared what's been happening with their sacred sites. They talked about their concerns for the future and shared their prophecies, which reflected Apache prophecies, saying that a great change is coming, and Mother Earth will clean herself if we don't alter how we care for all creation.

Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. shares that the Apache Stronghold is grateful for the Tohono O'odham, churches, the Indigenous community from the valley area, the Flagstaff community, and Hopi in standing with us to protect our sacred lands, religion, and waters. Throughout our journey in protecting Oak Flat, we've witnessed communities unifying together to protect Mother Earth and our human rights. We also

want to thank those who we've prayed with and who are coming with us to Washington D.C. on September 11th. He added, "We are looking to the future, what we're going to leave behind for our children, which leads to defending what's left. It reminds us that we're in a scary time, whether you look at it from the Indigenous perspective or a Christian one, we all have to join forces to fight this great evil that is destroying the Earth and suppressing all people. So we leave with prayers that are for hope, faith, and love for Mother Earth, as we bring the spirit of the West to the East."

The Apache Stronghold will continue to update you throughout the journey. We ask our community and everyone across this world to keep us in your thoughts and prayers, as we battle the greatest evil.