

This statement was delivered to the Zapatista gathering - Festival de la Dignia Rabina - in Mexico City in December, 2008:

Greetings to All My Relations,
My name is Ofelia Rivas Morales

My people are the O'odham from the desert. O'odham means people. The O'odham oral history teaches us where and when we originated and how to live on the land and follow our way of life called the Him'dag.

My homelands are illegally occupied by the United States of America and the Republic States of Mexico - an International Boundary bisected my homelands. Today we live in concentration camps called reservations "wards of the state", where the poverty levels are above national levels.

Colonization forced an attempted assimilation of my people. They built churches with our blood and through the cross of Christianity - a distortion of our sacred four directions symbol. The United States government policy is "The Only Good Indian is a Dead Indian." They forcibly removed Indigenous children from the homelands to boarding schools thousands of miles away and then relocated them to cities to become civilized citizens. I am a product of the boarding school. I was transported 1000 miles away from my family. My resistance is my language and I survive in living the Him'dag.

O'odham original homelands have been illegally mined and exploited without our consent. Our sacred places where we hold ceremonies and places we conduct prayer offerings are facing development and irreparable damage to the environment and spiritual well being of not just O'odham but the entire universe.

In Quitovac, Mexico we are fighting the development of a toxic waste dump project, approved by federal and state officials and SEMARNAT. Copper and gold mining in Arizona have contaminated the groundwater, and many O'odham are dying from cancers. In Hodai Kuk, a sacred place to the O'odham also known as Puerto Penasco in Sonora, Mexico has become a resort city. It has become a place where O'odham have no right to pray and conduct ceremonies to the sacred sea. Our land and water rights have been depleted and privatized. Our right of mobility is now restricted. The United States, in June 2009, will require all O'odham to carry legal documents to prove they are citizens in their own homelands.

My father's community is in Cu:Wi I-gersk, Sonora, Mexico and my mother's community is Ali Jegk, Arizona, USA. I hold my alliance with my Indigenous

brothers and sisters and my traditional O'odham Elders and ceremony leaders. The traditional O'odham hold their alliance to Mother Earth. No written documents required.

Summary

The fundamental voice in these gatherings is the voice of the traditional leaders of Indigenous peoples, the people that carry our sacred items, our sacred songs and our original voice. This is the source of our strength.

When our sacred places are exploited and mined and lost to development and globalization we are severed from the very essence of our people and our original strength.

I carry the words from my traditional elders and ceremony leaders. They call for solidarity to defend the sacred places of our people for our survival. They call to defend the source of our original birthplaces as people, Mother Earth, Father Sky and the sacred Water and Air.

Thank You for your allowing my voice, the voice of my Elders and Ancestors and our Future.