



Nevada Desert Experience

www.NevadaDesertExperience.org
1420 W. Bartlett Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89106

*Organizing Interfaith Resistance
to Nuclear Weapons and War*

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November 15, 2013

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Dear Pope Francis,

"Pace e bene!" We are Nevada Desert Experience, an interfaith peace organization in the United States that was founded by Franciscans in 1982. We lead people of faith in annual pilgrimages during Holy Week from Las Vegas, Nevada to the Nuclear Test Site, where 1,000 nuclear bombs have been detonated on Western Shoshone land. Because the United States government continues to make preparations for global nuclear war in the Nevada desert, we seek to work in partnership with the Western Shoshone nation to close the Test Site and restore the fragile land there.

We are writing to add our voices to other communities of faith in the United States, and to join the calls of indigenous peoples, to ask you to formally rescind the papal bulls of 1452 and 1493, which denied human rights to the indigenous peoples of the Americas. We would like to introduce to you a letter that Chief Johnnie Bobb, spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone nation, has written to you on behalf of the Western Shoshone National Council, asking you to restore the human rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.

As you know, the papal rulings of long ago sanctioned Christian enslavement and power over non-Christians and came to be known as the Doctrine of Discovery. Indian treaties have been interpreted throughout U.S. history with the idea that upon 'discovery,' the Indians lost their rights of sovereignty and independent nations and only retained a right of 'occupancy' in their lands. For the Western Shoshone people, this has meant that the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley has not been respected. For all humanity, this has meant that dangerous nuclear war preparations have been allowed to be conducted on their land.

Knowing that you personally have witnessed the plight of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, we ask you to lead the Western nations of the world by publicly rescinding the Doctrine of Discovery and these 15th century bulls. By doing so you would make it possible for people in the United States to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court and our Congress, that key court cases based on the Doctrine of Discovery must be overturned. This would be a crucial step toward justice for the Western Shoshone people, and toward returning their land to safe, peaceful, environmentally sound uses.

We thank you for your leadership for peace and justice!

Pace e bene, Nevada Desert Experience