

WESTERN SHOSHONE NATIONAL COUNCIL (WSNC)
P.O. Box 252
Austin, Nevada 89310

November 15, 2013

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Dear Pope Francis,

Greetings to you from the Western Shoshone Nation. We are writing to you to ask for your help in restoring the human rights of the more than 300,000,000 indigenous peoples of the world. We are asking you to rescind the Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1493.

Most people in the United States believe that one of the most highly regarded foundations of their government is the separation of "church and state." This is not true for the Native peoples of the United States. A U.S. Supreme court case, *Johnson v McIntosh* (21 US 543) in 1823, based its decision on the Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1493. In 1452 Pope Nicholas V ordered King Alfonso to "capture, vanquish, and subdue" non-Christians met in exploration, to "put them into perpetual slavery" and "to take all their possessions and property." Pope Alexander VI in 1493 gave Spain the right to conquer the land Columbus explored and in addition any lands "discovered" in the future. Thus, the "Doctrine of Discovery" the basis for United States Federal Indian Law up to the present time. *Johnson v McIntosh* has never been overturned and remains as law.

In 1863, the Western Shoshone entered into a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the government of the United States. The United States was in the middle of Civil War and needed gold from California, to the south and west of Shoshone land. The Treaty ceded no land and gave up no rights, but guaranteed safe passage to those passing through Shoshone land. Over the years, that Treaty, which is "Supreme law of the land" under the United States Constitution and still ruled in courts to be "in full force and effect" was ignored. These decisions, as well as legal decisions for all Native American Nations in the United States are based on *Johnson v McIntosh* which merges "church and state."

Western Shoshone land has been overrun by multinational corporations. Much gold has been found on the land. The third largest gold mine in the world is on Shoshone land. The gold is mined, using vast amounts of water and leaving so much methylmercury in the waters that only one fish a month can be eaten from most Nevada water bodies. Signs warning of the dangers are not prevalent and hungry people in poverty eat the fish, not seeing the warning signs and not knowing of the health dangers that will result. Uranium mines, molybdenum mines, oil wells, natural gas pipelines, and fracking exploration scar the landscape, and pollute the water. The Shoshone have never received financial benefit from the gold. It is sent out of the country, leaving the environmental devastation for someone to clean up.

Also on Shoshone land the United States established the Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site where over 1000 nuclear bombs have been exploded, many above-ground in the early 1950's and 1960's. People living in the area, mostly Western Shoshone and Paiute, were never notified of the dangers. They continued eating the wild game that wandered off the test site, contaminated by fallout. Many people have died from cancers, leukemias, and other disorders resulting from the nuclear deposition.

Because of underground testing, the waters underlying the Test Site have become contaminated, and are leaking billions of gallons of radiated water into the surrounding water tables. Nevada legislators know this, but do nothing. Now, the United States has reopened plans to store high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, also on Shoshone land. U-233, missile-grade uranium, waste from the Indian Point Reactor, housed now at Oak Ridge Nuclear facility will be transported to above-ground storage at the Nuclear Test Site. One of the largest drone bases in the United States is located adjacent to Shoshone land at Creech Air Base. Continuing build-up for war, weapons of mass destruction, all are developed on Western Shoshone land.

Native people are more affected by these environmental devastations. We still hunt and fish and use native plants for healing and for food. We use plants for creation of implements still. They may be contaminated. During the time of the above ground nuclear testing we used fur from the animals, we lived in houses built of branches and vegetation. We lived in mountains far from the radiation monitors which were in towns. We were more exposed, we were not informed of the dangers which were known. Birds, which are rare now, drank the water. The radiation entered our food chain.

We, Western Shoshone, believe that God (Appah) put us on this land to be its caretakers. We try to fight with words against the devastation. After exhausting all U.S. court remedies, we went to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva. In 2006 we were awarded a Decision 1(68), the first finding of human rights violations by the United States against a native people. The United States has ignored that decision and said that they don't have to listen to any courts other than their own. Thus we are back under the rule of the Papal Bulls.

We remain a very spiritual people, prayer is part of us. Yet we are considered inferior because we do not pray in the same way as Christians, because our world view includes the strong connection with family, plants, animals, insects, and all life on this world. It is our connection to the Land, to the Earth that separates us from those who would take the land from us in their greed. All this because of the greed of the so-called Discoverers, using the Papal Bulls as justification.

Please help us restore our humanity, please rescind the Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1493. Indigenous peoples and the poor of your country suffer from the same things for the same reasons. We are all one people with only one Earth.

Sincerely,

Johnnie L. Bobb, Chief
Western Shoshone National Council
Western Shoshone Nation