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PERSONAL TESTIMONY TO THE U.S. SENATE INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF THE RESOLUTION OF APOLOGY TO THE NATIVE PEOPLES
May 19, 2005

I was born November 7, 1949, in Oklahoma and am a full blood member of the Euchee (Yucci) tribe which was adopted into the Creek Nation. I am a descendant of Noah Gregory, Peace Chief of the Euchee Nation. I grew up in Okmulgee, Oklahoma and attended the Chilocco Indian Boarding School where I and many other native children were emotionally and physically abused. I am a business owner, and also a fourth generation minister from Methodist lineage to Native people in 158 tribes, and to many non-native congregations. I held the position of Human Services Director for the Creek nation for seven years, and am a certified drug and alcohol abuse counselor. Along with Dr. Jay Swallow (Southern Cheyenne/Sioux), I co-founded the Two Rivers Native American Training Center in Mounds, Oklahoma.

The beginning of my work on this Joint Resolution of Apology and hoped-for proclamation by President George W. Bush started in July of 1997 in Oklahoma. During a conference a group of non-native individuals began to apologize to Dr. Jay Swallow and myself. This set off a major reconciliation move in Oklahoma which is still continuing.

This vast and great land now called America is troubled and filled with brokenness and disorders of many kinds – high rates of crime, violence and murder, a divorce rate at 50% of all marriages, broken families, middle class people struggling to make ends meet even in a “good” economic time, widespread depression, suicide now the third greatest cause of death among all teenagers, rampant substance abuse and addiction, and more men and women in prison than in any other western nation. Racism and ethnic troubles abound. Many youth sit “homeless” as both parents work long hours. New and deadly types of disease are entering society. Death waits at our door.

I believe that acknowledging past atrocities and asking the indigenous “first nations” people of this land for forgiveness is needed as a “first step” for a healing of the land now called America to be released. This will be a healing not just for Native American people, but all the people of this land – Black, white, Hispanic and Asian – all ethnic groups. Many ethnic and immigrant backgrounds have been involved since the “first contact” by Columbus and others.

My international travels have shown me that many countries know the story of the Native American people and have studied the treatment of the Native People by the federal government. Some are now using our broken history as fuel to develop hatred toward America.

Together, our purpose must be to heal the land and to remove the heaviness which I am sure that this Senate knows and deals with on a daily basis. The weight of the loss of millions of Native indigenous people, of our painful broken history, and the dishonor and disorder is great.

All of our peoples are in great need of healing, especially as we are going through so much, in war, not just overseas, but here on the home front. Hatred and terrorism stare at us. We live in a time of great fear. Fear always leads to anger, hatred and strife. This anxiety streams into all of our homes, Native and non-native alike.

In Native homes many of our children literally fight for life every day. With unemployment, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide and accident rates very high, many homes have no mothers, or no fathers. Some might be physically there, but the love is not there, so the children turn to whatever is there for identity and release – false freedom. My people, our tribes, and our entire nation needs release and healing – true freedom.

While the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been a good help along the way, it has been an incomplete help. The Bureau is not authorized to issue the type of Resolution and bring about the reconciliation now under consideration.

Members of the human family are not just mind and body. There is a spirit in each man, woman and child. We all know this in our hearts regardless of what we each think or believe. Just ask our warriors, our soldiers who are facing death today on the battlefields in Afghanistan, Iraq and many other places. And, the spirit of a person and of a people can be wounded and crushed.

Apology, the exchange of forgiveness, and a show of respect and honor always brings a fresh freedom to our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. Apology and reconciliation is good medicine to the heart of a person or a nation. America needs this heart medicine and spirit healing. The broken promises and history of all of our peoples needs healing.

Why? some of you ask, and say that apology is unnecessary because “the native people have been always been a part of this government.” No, this government has never made treaties in the name of “In God We Trust” with any other people group in this country and then broken them all – 372 treaties with the Native Peoples – all broken! There has been no public apology to this day. No U.S. President has sought forgiveness. Only a few have even made private statements. You, members of the United States Senate, are taking a historic step forward.

Though Native soldiers have always courageously fought in above average ratios in the wars to defend this country and freedom – as is true in Iraq right now – this is not recognized. We are taken for granted. Evidence of the overall disregard and respect for Native Peoples is seen in the fact that we were not even granted U.S. citizenship until 1924. There has been no apology for this long-term rejection and dishonor. Our children know and feel this dishonor. Rejection causes sickness. Internal generational pain prompts mental disorder and causes the body to break down. There are unresolved root causes behind the sadness, the depression, the rampant diabetes, alcoholism and drugs and suicide. I know this as I pastor and look into the eyes of friends dying of diabetes.

The generational rejection we are suffering kills. On some reservations there are six or more suicides a month. Over the last decade an entire generation of young people was sacrificed to an epidemic of suicide on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. The poverty on some reservations is worse than in your inner cities. It is the hidden poverty that most in this nation know nothing about, nor do they care to. The poverty twists your thinking. Joy drains away, and you lose hope and heart. The pain is so great that it deceives. Native teenagers begin to give up and start thinking that suicide is good, that ending their own life will help the family. Life expectancy on some reservations is as low as 40-45 years in some cases – this is in affluent America today! But many Native people are hidden away, and few see or care to see, and to know.

Many in the past, and many today still wish we would have been annihilated, and that we will yet die off. We were given diseased blankets on purpose, and many froze and died along the forced march on our Trail of Tears. Certainly the sometimes calculated decimation of the Native American peoples from upwards of 12 million to less than 4 million must be considered genocidal in nature? And, as in the Crusades and Jewish holocaust, many of the atrocities, massacres and forced removals came in the name of Christianity.

Col. John Chivington who led the Sand Creek massacre on the morning of November 29, 1864 was a Methodist preacher. U.S. Lieutenant James Connor and other of Chivington's "Christian" soldiers have written eye witness accounts of how our pregnant women were disemboweled and mutilated, and how their private parts were cut out and proudly displayed as "war trophies."

This slaughter at Sand Creek, and others like it happened just days after Chief Black Kettle had met with white leaders and "made peace" and was told to just raise the U.S. flag and everything would be all right. Black Kettle gathered and tried to calm his people and raised the flag, and then the hail of bullets began and lasted all day. Few escaped, and most all that did were attacked again by "Christian" militia four years later at the Washita River massacre and finished off. Dr. Jay Swallow, my Southern Cheyenne/Sioux brother and co-founder of the Two Rivers Native American Training Center, is a direct descendant of the Sand Creek Massacre. His grandmother was one of the very few who escaped. She was a little girl and was hidden under a pile of wood. She survived the long day of slaughter and told her grandson. Dr. Swallow is another witness that can speak of the deep generational pain that Native people still carry from the days of massacre and suffering.

Yes, our besieged Native people retaliated. Yes, there were atrocities on both sides. We are strong warriors, but you know how it is recorded that many of our Chiefs first welcomed you in peace. We also said that we would study you and see how your "message" made you live.

The Bible your forbearers carried to us teaches that Satan, the fallen one, comes to steal, kill and destroy. That Jesus of Nazareth who died on the Cross, once for the forgiveness of all men and women, comes to bring life and blessing, and to share it abundantly. So, many Native people remain confused by Christianity, and by the "Christians" who came and took and "settled" our lands, and drove us away. We now call this wrong spirit "bad Christianity." It should not be surprising that most Native people still reject the "white man's God," and that many have returned to traditional Native religious practices. Some of us know that the Bible is the Word of Life from our Creator Father, and personally know Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord, and are sorry for how many of our people cannot see Jesus and have rejected Him. By walking in ways of reconciliation and respect we are reintroducing Jesus and "good Christianity" to our Native people. The Bible is true, even if the spirit and past ways of many "Christians" was not right.

The truth remains that our Native people were not received and affirmed and released. I know this from many years of personal experience, from my work with Native people in 158 tribes, in many prisons, as a alcohol and drug abuse counselor, and as I pastor and try to build strong faith and repair families in my churches.

I know this from the humiliation and degradation I endured as a boy in the Chilocco Indian Boarding School. When I first arrived I was excited and happy to see so many young Natives in one place, with different languages and traditions, yet how we talked and laughed and built good relationships. Then we were forbidden to speak in our languages, had all of our hair cut off into

the “G.I.” haircut, and the school took on a military and prison atmosphere. I was made to stay in an old dorm hut with broken windows. I knew very cold winters and very hot summers there. We got poorer and began to fight and steal from one another – the government gave clothes to some tribes, and not to others, so jealousy and envy entered in, and were turned against one another. Some fought and others withdrew into isolation.

We would try to stop the anger and bad feelings by drinking, or by sniffing glue, paint or lighter fluid. If caught drinking or speaking our tribal languages or practicing our cultural traditions our privileges and even food were taken away. At times we were put on bread and water. Sometimes we were given a bit of cheese with the bread and water. We were put into solitary confinement and punished. I can remember one night I had to defend myself from one of the counselors who was trying to provoke me and start trouble so he could give me hours of work duty, or to make me stand all night in a corner, or on top of a one foot by one foot box with my nose to the wall. If we were caught sleeping guards would walk up behind us and bang our heads into the wall. I received many bloody noses and cuts on my forehead. We were also made to scrub floors and walls with small hand brushes and even toothbrushes.

The emotional and mental abuse was very bad. We were made to feel that we were nothing. We were called “dogs” and “stupid” and “Indian” in an angry, degrading and mocking voice. There was sexual abuse as well that I would rather not talk about. I choose not to go into the details of all that happened there. When released and I returned home I would cry a lot. I developed resentments toward my parents and turned against authority. I could not trust authority. I could not adapt to public school. Many teachers treated Native and white students differently. I fought with white students who thought and acted like they were better than me. I got into trouble.

I did go back to the school site in my later years after coming to a personal faith in Christ, getting reconciled with my parents. Some praying people came with me and helped me work through the issues and hurts and come into inner spiritual healing –reconciliation and healing is a process

Please know that WE can forgive, if asked. For The Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears, we can forgive, if asked. For the Sand Creek and other massacres, we can forgive, if asked. For the Indian School degradation and injustice, we can forgive, if asked.

Because God created us to be people of the land, who express gratitude and desire to live in harmony and respect with the earth, we have much to share and a great role to play in the healing of this nation. We were 500 nations, and our Iroquois and other confederacies were examples that Benjamin Franklin and other of your founding fathers studied. The word “caucus” springs from the manner of Native tribal government. Then, as now, it is good to sit together and peacefully seek for wisdom, sound counsel and direction to move forward.

I know it takes one who is strong to ask for forgiveness, especially if they feel they had nothing personally to do with past injustices. But now, as you draw from your authority, strength and courage, together we will change the history of the human family, and help heal all brothers and sisters – from here in Washington out across the whole of this continent.

To apologize and give honor where honor is due will displace the brokenness and blood guiltiness that is still crying out for justice. Respect and mutual regard will again flow between us, from one honorable nation to another. Our Native people are ready for this and desire this,

but they just don't trust in this because of the past history. But if they are shown and taken on this "first step," then they will be able to believe again and will trust again.

Just imagine what the people of the world would think, say, and do – if they saw this reconciliation take place. What would happen if the President who represents all the people of this nation would stand and ask a people who will not go away and who has not forgotten, and who cannot forget – “Can and would you forgive this nation for the wrongs our forefathers did to your people?”

This is honorable and will return honor. The nations of the world would then have to look at the United States of America in a whole different way, in a new light. It will be a new day. I know healing and turning history is very difficult for some, but not impossible.

Imagine a U.S. President standing before the great Native Nations of over 600 different tribes and saying, “We the people of the United States of America ask for your forgiveness – for the broken treaties, the massacres, and the forced removal of peoples from their lands – for forgiveness of these things that history records and tells us took place, so that we all might now live as One Nation Under God!” This will stir this world. Nothing like this has ever taken place in history with the force and reconciling impact over a nation as this will have.

While reconciliation is a spiritual walk, it also releases mental and physical results – real changes that all are able to see. Healing of the heart and times of refreshing will come. Before my mother died she called me to her side and said in our Euchee tongue: “Nean-zo-d-towel-ute.” This means: “You are like a river and without you I cannot exist.” That is a picture of covenant life together. It is time to be the One Covenant Nation of many peoples our Creator desires. We must go forward and not look back again. Together, let us take this first step. This Resolution of Apology gives us ground to walk forward on.

I respectfully submit this for the good of all our peoples – and for the healing of this whole land now called America.

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