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Diné Homeowners & Communities Association, Inc.

Statement of the Descendants of Relocated Families impacted by Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974, the forced displacement of Navajo Families.

Coalmine Canyon, Navajo Nation, Arizona

I. Introduction

The Diné Homeowners & Communities Association, Inc. is a non-governmental organization established to represent and advocate for the relocated Navajos and their descendants of PL93-531, the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974 and 10(f) of PL93-531, the “Bennett Freeze” of 1966. The Diné Homeowners & Communities Association in collaboration with The Forgotten People is currently conducting and compiling a study to determine the number of Navajo individuals impacted by the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974. The number of descendants of the original relocated families has obviously tripled or may have quadrupled since 1974. No current studies or research has been compiled by any agency.

The mission of the Diné Homeowners & Communities Association is to offer and disseminate information regarding accessible resources; to assist and represent the community; the rights to thereof the community psychological, physiological, sociological, and environmental well-being with respect to the Diné philosophy, “Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón” the cultural traditions and customs of the Navajo Nation; including human rights, social welfare, and community development, via developing effective communication with local resources for the purpose of coordinating with tribal, county, state, and federal government entities.

II. Background

The Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974, PL93-531, has caused our parents and grandparents immense irreversible psychological, physiological, and sociological deterioration. These relocated families have endured the tragedy of being forcibly evicted from their homes and ancestral homeland, helplessly watched as their homes, livestock, ceremonial hogans, and sweat lodges were destroyed, endured the loss of livelihood, subject to isolation from their kin, and once more forced to experience the trauma of Hweeldi' also known as The Long Walk of 1864. The law has resulted in psychological, economic, and social oppression, which has contributed to poverty, homelessness, psychological disorders, and other social disorders.

The foundation of the Navajo culture is "Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón", which has once again been irrevocably disrupted. "Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón" is a holistic worldview characterized by respect to all environmental factor and maintaining a state balance and harmony.

III. Impact of Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974

Numerous Diné families have been evicted and relocated from Hopi Partitioned Lands (HPL) or the "Bennett Freeze" area since 1974. Many have been forced to relocate elsewhere off the Navajo Reservation and some have been relocated outside their original chapter boundaries. These individuals, their families, and their descendants have been permanently displaced.

We, the descendants of these relocated individuals have reached adulthood and are at the present entering the natural lifestage in which we will become grandparents or are grandparents. We have been deprived of our inherent right to exist in a traditional Diné hooghan, as a result, have been denied the privilege to fully understand and appreciate the principals of our native culture, to understand our Diné philosophy, and to participate in our native cultural beliefs and practices; therefore, our cultural identity has been irrevocably compromised, and we are denied to live according to our traditional Diné way of life and to appreciate and practice the Diné philosophy.

The demise of our cultural, social, and spiritual beliefs has contributed to the loss of our

cultural identity. The loss of self-identity, the loss of our prayers due to inaccessibility of our sacred sites has resulted in the loss of spirituality; the loss of our homes has contributed to depression; the loss of our livelihood has resulted in poverty; and the loss of our traditional elders who were our educators, has resulted in loss of customary law and governance.

We have been advised by the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation (ONHIR), as descendants we are considered "relocatees". However, established laws and guidelines exclude the descendants from seeking or receiving benefits established for relocated individuals impacted by the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974. We are denied benefits from the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation due to guidelines established and are excluded for rights in obtaining assistance from the Office of Navajo-Hopi Land Commission. In 1974, the children under the age of 18 years, legally under the guardianship of their parents, are not eligible for these benefits.

We are considered outsiders and treated as immigrants; for that reason, discrimination exists due to our inherited relocation status from the United States Government and the Navajo Nation. We, the descendants are restricted and denied access to an adequate home except for the one acre lot in which the homes of our parents have been constructed. These homes are currently overcrowded, unsafe, and have fallen into disrepair due to refusal of our local governments to renovate or remodel these homes based on our inherited relocation status. Imposed on us are the unnecessary hardships such as homelessness in which up to three generations of our families reside in one home, as a result, we are now refugees in our own nation. We desire to reside in a safe adequate home. We understand our Diné hooghan (home) and what the home represents has been irrevocably destroyed.

As long as this inhumane and unjust law exists, it will cause the intergenerational transfer of emotional and social oppression of relocated families and their descendants. The psychological, physiological, and sociological disorders are imminent. The psychological consequences are enormous, for instance, substance abuse, depression, suicide, and numerous other destructive disorders will continue to intensify.

Therefore, we, the children, have been traumatized, neglected, emotionally, socially, sociologically abused by the historical trauma imposed on our people. We believe we suffer from Intergenerational Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome in which “the dynamics in effect in the Jewish experience are similar to those of the Native American experience” (Duran & Duran, 1995-03, p. 30).

Whereas, the United States represents and endorses human rights and democracy, the people of the Navajo Nation endorse respect and obligation based on the cultural philosophy of K’e (kinship). Therefore, we the children of relocated Navajos, desire our right to live in harmony and appreciate our culture.

We the descendants of Hweeldi’ and “Relocation” wish to rebuild and progress in a constructive, positive manner, and live in harmony to benefit our children, our community, and society. More importantly, to once more begin the healing process to reestablish the Diné philosophy of K’e(kinship), to rebuild our self-identity and self-esteem through our cultural identity, and to attain self-sufficiency and self-determination within our new communities. We, the descendants desire the right to live according to our Diné philosophy of “Sa’ah Naagháí Bik’eh Hózhóón” the cultural traditions and customs of the Navajo Nation.

IV. Recommendations

Therefore, we, the descendants of relocated individuals and families, recommend for the Human Rights Commission to:

1. To recognize the continuous negative cultural, psychological, sociological impact of PL93-531, The Navajo Hopi Settlement Act of 1974.
2. To prohibit any future laws of forced relocation of indigenous people in the Americas.
3. To recommend that an accurate number of descendants be compiled.
4. To recommend revision of eligibility criteria for Office of Navajo Hopi Relocation to include the descendants.