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The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

This letter is in support of the Clemency Petition for Leonard Peltier.

As long-time regional director of the Denver office of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, I have had the great opportunity of working with tribal governments, urban Indians, and Native American advocacy organizations over many years. In this capacity, I have directed public hearings and investigations and published reports concerning discrimination against First Americans, including the justice system, reservation border-towns, education, access to health care, voting rights and numerous other critical civil rights issues.

In 2000, we published a report: Native Americans in South Dakota, An Erosion of Confidence in the Justice System (South Dakota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights) that reflected the deep distrust and alienation felt by many Native people toward the criminal justice system. Further studies by the State Supreme Court and the University of South Dakota confirmed the reality of disparities in the administration of justice.

This report built upon earlier studies documenting the failure of the justice system to provide equal treatment for Indians in the state.

Those of us in the civil rights community are well aware of your initiatives in combatting these ingrained problems, including your signing of the Tribal Law and Order Act, strengthening government to government relations, resolving longstanding legal claims, and making permanent the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. We have been proud to witness your appointment of many Native Americans to significant executive and policy positions within your Administration. Your legacy as president will include these, and many other commitments you have made to improve the lives of our native population.

Now comes an opportunity for you to perform one additional executive action that will have meaningful significance to Native Americans and indigenous peoples throughout the world: the granting of Executive Clemency to Leonard Peltier. Mr. Peltier was convicted of murdering two F.B.I. agents many years ago in South Dakota, during a time of intense racial and political strife on the Pine Ridge reservation. There has been well-documented evidence of prosecutorial

misconduct in the legal proceedings against Mr. Peltier. Two other men accused of these same crimes were acquitted by a jury on grounds of self-defense.

Re-opening the wounds of this horrible period in Indian Country would serve no good purpose, and is not necessary.

The United States Sentencing Commission has recently broadened criteria for compassionate release of federal prisoners. Federal inmates are now eligible for compassionate release for reasons of age, medical condition, family circumstances or "other extraordinary and compelling reasons."

Mr. Peltier has now been imprisoned almost 40 years and is nearing 70 years of age. He is in poor health and this may be the final opportunity for him to return home to his family for his remaining time. During his incarceration, Mr. Peltier has become an accomplished author and artist whose work has been recognized by human rights organizations world-wide. He most certainly meets the new criteria established in the sentencing guidelines for "compassionate release." And providing him with clemency under these guidelines would in no manner dishonor the lives of the F.B.I. agents who so tragically lost their lives.

Your acting favorably on the Clemency Petition would send a strong message throughout the world that our country believes in addressing the plight of indigenous people, and providing a compassionate solution to a human rights cause that has garnered wide international support.

I urge that you act favorably on this Petition.

And finally, thank you Mr. President for your extraordinary vision and extensive actions on behalf of helping to right the nation's unjust treatment of Native Americans throughout our history. You will be remembered for this, and human rights advocates will be forever grateful.

Sincerely,

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