

Our ref: GP/sb/ep

Your ref:

December 22nd, 2016

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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington D.C. 20500
USA

Dear President Obama,

In respect of the case of Leonard Peltier

I write to you as a British attorney who has for more than 40 years defended individuals and communities in highly charged circumstances, frequently torn apart by a history of injustice and the politics of internal conflict, and involving many communities collectively deemed suspect. Such conflicts have caused decades of bitterness and reaction in the last century and continuing into this. You will be aware of a number of those cases I feel sure, in particular those that have involved men and women from the Irish community (one family in particular, the Conlons and the Maguires became the subject of a compelling film, "In the Name of the Father"). In moving towards a resolution of the bitter conflict in the North of Ireland, no voice was more persuasive and influential than that of those Americans who compelled a fresh approach – of sanity, justice and mercy - to be addressed by all parties to the conflict including by the British government.

I write to you having observed closely and personally over four decades, the extraordinary and transformative effect that a merciful executive act, unexpected and imaginative, in relation to a past segment of history can have in changing the potential for the present and the future. Thus it was, heavily influenced by the intervention of your country, that first several, and then hundreds of Irish men and women in prison (some entirely wrongly, others not in the sense conventionally understood of being wrongly convicted but nevertheless epitomising a far more profound history of injustice), came to be released (first through urgent reference back to the courts where wrongful convictions, however belatedly, to be overturned, but then, in bold acts of political imagination, all prisoners who had been part of the conflict released in the knowledge that that and only that and their endorsement of a future of peace, could in fact lead to its being achieved).

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President Barack Obama
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One of those individuals whom I represented lent his support to the release of Leonard Peltier; Gerard Conlon, who has now died, spent his life in the years after his release from an English prison arguing for the need for similar comprehension as well as mercy and justice for others as he had, after many years, finally received himself. He travelled and spoke frequently and passionately in America as a reciprocal act in recognition and thanks to those Americans who had fought for him, joining his voice in turn to help Americans rediscover for themselves the power of a merciful approach.

I write to you with respect in the firm knowledge that the time urgently to consider the release of Mr Peltier is here and to endorse such action as one of enormous significance to many far beyond the prisons of the United States. I thank you for your consideration of my letter. It is incumbent upon those of us who have observed the importance of such actions in the past and who have had good reason to thank the United States for the part it has played in bringing justice not just to individuals but to the communities from which they come not to be silent when there is a time to speak.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth Peirce
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