

Greetings, My Relatives of the world,

I am Ofelia Rivas, an O'odham from what is now Northern Sonora Mexico and Southern Arizona, United States.

I am bringing greetings and a message from the O'odham Elders and ceremonial leaders from my father's community of Cu:Wi I-gersk, Mexico and my mothers community of Ali Jegk, United States.

I want to first pay tribute to the Elders and the children, our inspiration and our hope and then the people who worked to bring us to this moment. Many women and men warriors have long passed but are here with us in spirit.

One is my father Thomas Rivas from Cu:Wi I-gersk. Who his entire short life fighting to hold on to our remaining communities in Mexico.

The O'odham we not included in the design of this border but now live with the problems. The remaining nine communities in Mexico along the US/MX International Border and our territory in Southern Arizona United States have become a state of occupation and militarization. There are United States Border Patrols, U.S. Customs and Immigration agents, U.S Drug agents, U.S Special Drug Agents, U.S Joint Task Forces including the Army and Air Force, Special U.S. Drug agents with specifically trained U.S. Drug Smugglers Trackers as well as other state and local and regional border monitors. The O'odham in the U.S. we have 76 miles of US/MX International border, which divided our territory into two countries. On any given day in O'odham Country on State Route 86, a road of 135 miles you can encounter 40 U.S. Border Patrol vehicles with two to three agent in each vehicle.

In our communities in Mexico we are the poorest but rich in tradition. We have hand dug wells used by O'odham and animals, the Mexican farmers and ranchers have encroached upon our comminutes through illegal permits. There is mining and environmental damage by unmonitored gold leachfield leaks. Our O'odham are harassed by Mexico State Security Police (the Military) and the Federales who is the Army fully armed with high tech weapons and vehicles who many times escort large quantities of drugs into the United States.

Our Elder and community members are held hostages in their own communities in the United States, we are questioned at our every move within our federally recognized reservation, the Tohono O'odham Nation. The O'odham can not freely go collect traditional foods or gather firewood without fear of harassment and asked to produce documents to prove who they are.

I am directed to state that this, the establishment and historic first session of United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is of grave importance and hold great responsibility and accountability of all entities involved.

We place our confidence that we can first demand of all Nations and States to put down all weapons. The weapons that have killed countless Indigenous peoples on this entire Mother Earth. I want my grandchild of five to heal from the damage caused by U.S. Border Patrols pointed weapons at my head shouting at my face demanding documents. We cried that day and prayed to our Creator to protect our lives, as do many people through this world, we have cried and now we must begin a healing.

We have every confidence that you will address the abuse of our Mother Earth throughout the world. In my home we have U.S. based Hecla Mining Company mining gold and silver near sacred grounds and sacred sites as well as communities. The leaks from gold leach field ponds remain unmonitored yet we see our dead wildlife and the disappearance of traditional medicinal plants specific to the area. We see U.S. Corporations reducing the beachfronts in Schuk Taok the O'odham traditional territory. In the U.S. the Border Patrols are creating roads along the border fences and created roads without notice to the communities destroying all natural grasses and precious relatives the desert plants. This disrupts the total desert harmony within the region.

We have every confidence you will address the protection of our sacred sites and sacred ceremonial bundles and our sacred specific ways as indigenous peoples. Border agents at the U.S. Port of Entry have handled the O'odham sacred ceremonial bundles. We pray for them because they don't understand the consequences. We are restricted to use our traditional routes to hold our ceremonies in Mexico. The O'odham should be free to cross the border because this is our ancestral home and we have the right to practice our traditional ways on our sacred grounds. We the O'odham were not involved in the design of this border thereby its policies. The O'odham just as many all Indigenous peoples throughout the world were given obligations as first peoples of the world, we are charged with conducting our ceremonies to keep the universe in balance and nurture Mother Earth. It is not a performance, it is necessary that all indigenous people sing their songs in their languages that the Mother Earth knows well.

Dear Indigenous people I will not be afraid to say this, I am disheartened to continue to see the misuse and the disrespect of our sacred traditional ways. We have been given particular gifts that we hold as the original people of this world, but I continue to see non-O'odham, my people and non-Indigenous people misuse and corrupt our sacred ways. We must address this to stop this misuse because as indigenous peoples we have seen the consequences. We must understand for example the eagle feather before we can have the honor to use it for the good of humanity. These types of understandings come with great commitment and dedication to a particular item. It is not an item to be picked up and used for stature and credibility. Esteemed members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues we as Indigenous peoples have this past five hundred years been forced to gather instruments of this colonization impacted world, now we must gather all our abilities to begin to address our great many critical issues.

We will remember each and every human being at this forum at our summer ceremonies.

In behalf of the Elder of the Cu:Wi I-gersk community of Northern Sonora Mexico and the ceremony Elders from Ali Jegk community, Arizona United States I thank you for this time, Ofelia Rivas.

Friday, 12 April 2002

Border Patrol vehicle kills O'odham man near Sells

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

A U.S. Border Patrol vehicle struck and killed a man near Sells Tuesday, law enforcement officials said.

The crash happened about 4:30 a.m. just southwest of the Tohono O'odham capital on Federal Route 20, also known as Cowlic Road, Tohono O'odham Police Chief Larry Seligman said. He declined to release the victim's name, but said the victim was an O'odham man about 20.

Seligman said the circumstances were still unclear. He could not say, for example, what the man was doing on the road or whether he was walking there.

The FBI and the Arizona Department of Public Safety were aiding in the investigation, Seligman said. The Border Patrol's critical incident team is investigating, too, agency spokesman Ryan Scudder said.

"Our reconstructionists still need to piece together all the data that was collected at the scene," Seligman said. "A lot of detail needs to come together on this before we come to any conclusions."

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