

On the Oglala Commemoration 50th Anniversary Statement from Leonard Peltier

Greetings my relatives, friends, supporters, loved ones. I want you to understand that after all these years in prison, I may not think like you, I may not talk in a way you think I should talk, but times like these wear on you.

You get old. Your knees hurt. Your back hurts. Everything hurts.

You get to a point where you see things as they really are, past the flowery words that people use to make you feel good about things that are irrelevant.

In talking about my case, sometimes I think I talk too much about it, sometimes not enough. In thinking about freedom and thinking about justice, it is very hard to not think about it. When you are imprisoned, when you are in a box, a large coffin, day in and day out, year in and year out, it never ends. It's like you are buried alive. At this particular time of my imprisonment, not just me, but other prisoners in this maximum security facility are constantly put on unjustifiable lockdown, where we are confined to our cells day after day. It's like a prison within a prison. We are confined to a 6 by 10 foot space, with barely any room to move and we can't exercise, shower, or get medical attention. This has been happening constantly and it is a form of torture and is basically illegal. Somewhere in the constitution there is a law against cruel and unusual punishment. This is happening so often it's cruel as hell, and it's becoming to where it's not even unusual. There needs to be a change to take place. We need people to contact their Members of Congress, Senators, and the President. The United States is not supposed to be the way it's become. What's happening to me, and these other prisoners could happen to you, your family, and members of your community. If we can't put a stop to it, it will become normal, and people will die and commit suicide in prison. They will lose all hope that there can be any relief from their suffering. Reach out wherever you can to make a difference, to make a change. Maybe I'm talking too much about prison, but I can't talk enough about justice in this world, in this nation.

Every piece of evidence used to convict me has been proven false in court. It is built on lies. They broke all kinds of international laws to get me out of Canada. They have not lived up to the agreements they signed when they extradited me. These things are a matter of court record – not me just saying it with an attitude. Information is still coming to light about two nations colluding to bury me.

On that day in 1975, I stood against the extermination of our people. Almost five decades later I still stand, undestroyed.

For almost five decades my life has been a series of tortures. In Canada I was held on death row, in a cellblock with no light, waiting to be executed. In Leavenworth they kept me in the hole for weeks without telling my people, in 130-degree heat. In Marion I was held under complete sensory deprivation. In Coleman 1 I have been locked down for two years in a filthy coffin without medical care, communication, or even a shower, for weeks at a time.

Still, I stand in the truth.

I could have left prison on a lie, but my sacrifice must count for something, or my life counts as nothing.

Beyond that, I want to remind everyone of the need for us to help our children develop strong coping skills. Help them develop healthy leisure activities. We need to find a way to combat the rampant meth abuse I have become aware of throughout our reservations, and alcoholism, which has always been our downfall. Alcohol is a drug. Common people don't think of it as a drug, but it is something that has caused lasting generational trauma. Lasting generational damage to the DNA of our people and the children coming along.

Aside from all that, we need to develop survival skills so that our children know how to talk, to speak, conduct themselves, to know what to watch out for in this country that hates us. They want what we have, and we stand in the way of it. They want the resources that are left on our reservations. They want gold. Uranium. Now they are wanting all the stuff it takes to make batteries, and they look to the reservations, land that hasn't been exploited.

You don't hear of them digging up a farmer's field anywhere, or moving a rich man's house, but they don't have trouble condemning an Indian's house, or land, and taking that.

We have to prepare ourselves. We have to take responsibility for our health and our wellbeing. The food we are forced to eat, one way or another, is contaminated with poisons. We are given a shelf-life of years for food that will spoil in a day.

All of these things contribute to bad health. Bad hearts. Cancer.

These are things I am forced to think of in prison. I love our people. I stand for our people. If it was not for that, I don't know where I would be, but I probably wouldn't be in here.

You need to do your part. You need to stand up. You need to speak out. You need to not only speak out, but you need to do things. You need to do what's necessary to stop the exploitation and destruction of our people and our land. The best way to do that is through education. Make sure our children know how to provide for themselves and future generations and this Mother Earth.

The education system that has put us where we are at now is detrimental to life itself. Life seeks life.

Life isn't based on chemicals and oil. Life is based on the natural things the Creator made for us. We are connected to the trees. The trees give us oxygen. They give us shade. They give us food. They give us building materials – all these things.

That is why I am trying to promote a “plant a tree” movement around the world. A Food Forest. You know, there is nothing I can do from in here. I do my best to use the limited contacts I have to enhance life for future generations, our children’s children, children of the whole earth.

This is something we all need to do.

In talking, I want to remember Joe Stuntz. A lot of people have given their lives for the Movement. Joe Stuntz gave his life that day, June 26th. A young man stood as a man and said, “You can’t come here. You can’t treat us this way.”

They shot him and killed him.

Joe didn’t die. His spirit lives on. The spirit of resistance. The spirit of standing up for what’s right and trying to right what is wrong.

This day of remembrance, a day of honoring people who stood here on these grounds. When I say “these grounds”, all the grounds across the earth are ours. We are indigenous to this land. There are other people who are citizens here, but they are not indigenous to this land. They may be from Europe, Asia, any place else around the world, but we are indigenous to this land.

Wherever we stand. Wherever we walk, we walk amongst the ashes of our people.

I want you to enjoy this day, enjoy tomorrow, but do what you have to do. To be prepared, to prepare your children for all of the things that are coming down because of this society that believes they are always one purchase away from happiness.

Everybody in this society and the corporations teach you to live like a drug addict – anything for a quick fix.

We need to live for the generations. We need to live for our people.

If my words and thoughts sound a bit scattered, I do not often get a chance to express myself to you. There are so many things I want to say. Maybe I have said too much, or not enough.

I love you. I care about you. I pray about you.

I seek my freedom. In seeking my freedom, I hope I can overturn the illegal attitudes that have put me here and caused many of our people to overcrowd prisons.

In South Dakota, I think the state population is around 15% for Native people, but we make up 45% of the prison population.

That’s wrong. That is because of poverty, a lack of education, and the boarding schools that did their best to destroy us.

Having said all that – I love you. I care about you. I want you to be safe. I want you to live safe, I want you to live healthy.

Remember me. If you can, plant a tree.

For now, your relative, brother, elder, Leonard Peltier.

Mitakuye Oyasin.

In the Spirit of Crazy Horse.

Doksha,

Leonard Peltier