



NATIVE AMERICAN RIGHTS FUND JUSTICE

STANDING FIRM FOR JUSTICE FOR OVER 45 YEARS

Letter from the Executive Director

SPRING 2017

As we start this New Year – and a new Presidential Administration – I stand committed to tackle the legal issues so critical to the state of life in Native America today. Here are a few accomplishments from 2016 that your membership and support helped achieve:

- ❖ In Virginia and Montana, NARF represented tribes seeking federal acknowledgment that they have the right to exist as sovereign nations.
- ❖ NARF was honored to stand firm with the people of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their attorneys to protest for a stop to the Dakota Access Pipeline and provide a strong and unified voice in the federal courts to stop the desecration of Sacred Indian Ground.
- ❖ As part of the Native American Voting Rights Coalition (NAVRC), we worked on a multi-pronged strategic plan for the 2016 elections and formed partnerships to address voting rights issues, including the first comprehensive, multistate survey of Indian voters.
- ❖ To protect and advance the Indian vote in Alaska, NARF expanded our work to ensure that all voting materials are translated from English into indigenous languages for speakers of Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Gwich'in and others.
- ❖ In North Dakota, we advocated to secure voting rights for many Native Americans living on Indian reservations who do not have qualifying identifications to vote, such as driver's licenses or state ID cards and were prohibited from casting their ballots in primary and general elections.
- ❖ NARF supported the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition's work to educate those responsible for Native American boarding school abuse, to seek justice, to sustain community-led healing and petition to repatriate the remains of Indian students buried at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School Cemetery and return their remains to their ancestors.
- ❖ Along with numerous representatives from tribes in the United States, NARF supported the Paris Agreement – the first ever universally binding accord on climate change – and lobbied for language concerning indigenous issues in the Agreement itself and the decision adopting it.
- ❖ In every region throughout the United States, NARF worked with tribes still fighting for water access and hunting and fishing rights.

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With you by our side throughout 2017, NARF will take on the cases that truly impact the survival of Native American tribes and their families across Indian Country. Thank you for your concern and support.

John E. Echohawk
Executive Director, Native American Rights Fund



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NARF is firmly committed to continue our fight to protect Native rights and expand tribal sovereignty – and fight we will. We stand by our commitment as “Modern Day Warriors” to do so.



Frequently Asked Questions about Native Peoples

Who is a Native American? A person who is of some degree Indian blood and is recognized as an Indian by a tribe/village and/or the U.S. There exists no

universally accepted rule for establishing a person’s identity as Native American. The criteria for tribal membership differs from one tribe to the next. The Bureau of the Census counts more than 2.4 million Native Americans.

What is an Indian Tribe? An Indian tribe was originally a body of people bound together by blood ties who were socially, politically, and religiously organized, who lived together in a defined territory and who spoke a common language or dialect. In the eyes of the U.S. government a body of people as described above must be officially recognized in order to be considered a tribe.

What does the term “federally recognized” mean? Only tribes who maintain a legal relationship to the U.S. government through binding treaties, acts of Congress, executive orders, etc., are officially “recognized” by the federal government. These tribes are sovereign, independent nations with the right to form their own laws, adjudicate legal cases and levy taxes within their borders, establish membership,

and decide their own futures. Over 550 federally recognized tribes exist in the U.S. and Alaska.

What is a reservation? A land base that a tribe reserved for itself when it relinquished its other land areas to the U.S. through treaties. Congressional acts, executive orders and administrative acts that created reservations.

Are Indians United States citizens? Yes. In 1924 all Native Americans were granted citizenship and the right to vote in national elections. All Native Americans born within the territorial limits are by law citizens. Most native people are also members of their tribes.

Do Indians pay taxes? Yes. All Indians are subject to federal income taxes. Whenever a member of an Indian tribe conducts business off the reservation, that person also pays state and local taxes. State income taxes are not paid on reservation or trust lands, but tribal governments have the power to also levy taxes on reservation lands.

Do Native Americans receive any special rights or benefits from the U.S. government? No. Funds distributed to a person of Indian descent may represent fulfillment of treaty obligations, compensation for lands taken in connection with governmental projects or extraction of tribal natural resources.

Adapted from the U.S. Dept. of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs’ publication American Indians Today: Answers to Your Questions, Third Edition, 1991.



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Visit us online at www.narf.org
to see how your membership is helping,
to promote justice for tribes and indigenous peoples and
to learn more about recent news and upcoming events.

Priorities of NARF:

- Preservation of tribal existence
- Protection of tribal natural resources
- Promotion of Native American human rights
- Accountability of governments to Native Americans
- Development of Indian law and educating the public about Indian rights, laws, and issues

