

SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBE

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Dr. John Bush
Vice-Chairman



May 6, 2011

Barack Obama
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500-0003

Re: Operation Geronimo

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, we vehemently object and oppose the designation of the name of our Apache leader, Geronimo, as a military euphemism for an evil man, Osama bin Laden, by the United States. The San Carlos Apache Tribal Council has thoughtfully and carefully consulted on this extremely sensitive issue and respectfully request that you do the following:

- (1) Immediately issue a formal apology for equating the name of Geronimo with Osama Bin Laden as part of the military exercise;
- (2) Immediately issue an Executive Order, as Commander in Chief, that the name "Geronimo" never be used disparagingly and in association with a known enemy of the United States;
- (3) Promote Federal Indian Policy that seeks to uplift and recognize Native American contributions to society, such as that of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, and implement policies to improve the way of life for the Apache people.

As described in more detail below, the San Carlos Apache Tribe takes this opportunity to provide you historical perspective and context as to why the use of Geronimo's name is so highly offensive and how this misuse and degradation of our Apache leader's name is symptomatic of the challenges and problems we face on the San Carlos Apache Reservation.

Historical Perspective

Geronimo, which was not the name actually provided to him by his family and instead was referenced to him by Mexican and early American settlers, was one of many Apache leaders of the San Carlos Apache Tribe who took arms to defend their homes, women, children, land base and way of life. This country was not barren when early settlers arrived. The land was lush and well populated by many proud Native American Indian nations.

In February, 2009, the San Carlos Apache Tribe honored Geronimo with a special dedication on the San Carlos Apache Reservation commemorating the 100th year of his passing. The Arizona Government and the United States Government similarly honored Geronimo and H.Res. 132, from the 111th Congress, honored Geronimo for “his extraordinary bravery, and his commitment to the defense of his homeland, his people, and Apache ways of life.”

The San Carlos Apache reservation encompasses over 1.8 million acres and is home to over 14,500 enrolled members, as well as many non-members and non-Indians. I am proud to serve as Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe that honors its Veterans with extensive Veteran’s Day celebrations consisting of a parade, rodeo, carnival and other festivities. It is with great pride that we honor our Veterans who endure great hardships for the benefit of our freedom and safety. For these reasons we have always and continue to support and praise our Veterans for traveling far and wide to engage in combat so that Americans can continue to live in freedom.

Numerous Apache families have informed the San Carlos Apache Tribal Council of their extreme disappointment and mental anguish from learning that such an evil and hated man and number one enemy to the United States was designated as Geronimo in a military operation. To be told that the name of Geronimo is associated with Osama Bin Laden is a cruel irony for a people that have fought heroically and steadfastly for the United States of America.

It is important to note that the use of language and names is critically important under the Apache way of life. In the Apache language, specific words have very special and unique meanings. So, while some may find that using Geronimo as a code name does not have much meaning, the opposite is true for members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Native Americans, such as the San Carlos Apache Tribe, have contributed greatly to the development of the United States. Nearly all of the current agricultural crops were obtained from Native Americans. America's democracy was modeled after Iroquois traditions as being a preferred governmental structure as compared to the monarchies of Europe.

The use of Geronimo in association with the most hated enemy of the United States only reinforces negative stereotypes of Apaches as somehow enemies of the United States. As I am sure you are aware, countless Native Americans have fought valiantly on behalf of the United States of America including Ira Hayes, an Arizona O’odham, who was one of the Marines who raised the flag at Iwo Jima in World War II. A Hopi female servicewoman recently received honors in Arizona after being killed in the Iraq conflict. We have numerous members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe that are serving in the United States military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It does them a great injustice to refer to Osama Bin Laden as “Geronimo.”

Unfortunately, the history of the San Carlos Apache Tribe has been replete with broken promises by the Federal Government which has substantially contributed to the social problems Apache's face in everyday life. We suffer from extremely high unemployment, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and other social ills that have contributed to cycles of poverty on the Reservation. Since the inception of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, federal policies ranging from the removal of the tribal members from its most fertile lands to the attempted elimination of Apache language and culture have created extreme hardships for the Apache people. Yet, when it comes to serving our country, no people have fought more valiantly and courageously than the Apaches.

We look forward to your leadership, as President of the United States, to eliminate the unfortunate stereotype that we live in a cowboy and Indian society and that Native Americans are somehow enemies. We are not enemies. We are a strong and dynamic part of the American society.

Mr. President, as you placed the wreath to acknowledge the lives that were lost on 09/11 at Ground Zero, it is our sincere hope that you acknowledged the important cultural and spiritual contributions of Native Americans, such as the San Carlos Apache Tribe. May the Great Spirit that we all pray to in our own cultural ways and beliefs provide you guidance to help our people and our Nation. We, the Apaches, are spiritual people. And we believe there is unforeseen and dynamic power in prayer that can make the seemingly impossible, possible.

We cordially invite you to visit the San Carlos Apache Reservation to continue our dialogue for the benefit of our people. May God Bless you, May God Bless the San Carlos Apache Tribe and May God Bless the United States of America.

Respectfully,



TERRY RAMBLER
Chairman
San Carlos Apache Tribe

cc: Sen. Jon Kyl
Sen. John McCain
Sen. Daniel Akaka
Sen. John Barrasso
Rep. Paul Gosar
John Lewis, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona
Jefferson Keel, President of the National Congress of American Indians
San Carlos Apache Tribe Vice-Chairman John Bush
San Carlos Apache Tribal Council Members