Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Department of the Interior announced today that it plans to distribute more than $14 million to the Absentee Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma and the Cherokee Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma on September 15, 1977.

The money was awarded to the Delawares by the Indian Claims Commission as compensation for land taken by the United States in violation of an 1854 treaty.

The two tribes have requested an immediate distribution of the funds and have initiated mandamus litigation to this end. Under Secretary of the Interior James A. Joseph said that the September 15 date was chosen because "Members of Congress have requested time for consideration of proposed legislation now pending before Congress to include a third group of Delaware Indians in the distribution of the funds."

A recent Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of an Act of Congress under which the Absentee and Cherokee Delawares are to receive the funds, but it also stated that Congress could change the distribution act to include the third group, the Kansas Delawares.

Under Secretary Joseph said that the Department would modify its plan for the distribution of the funds to accord with any forthcoming court order or amendment of the act.