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Washington, DC

Regarding: *Chihene Nde Nation* petition/application # 404

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Lynda Sánchez. I am a writer, historian and retired educator. I have worked with and among Apaches and Hispanics as well as other ethnic groups in the border country for more than 45 years. As records, maps and translated documents on both sides of the Border have opened up vast new horizons and information on the peopling of those lands, we have finally come to realize that no matter which side of the border one calls home, the BORDER is simply a line drawn by men. That line does not stop the historical events, animal or human migrations nor does the geography end there for one nation or the other. It must be viewed as a whole and it should be understood within that exciting and wide-ranging context.

Therefore, please consider this letter as my commentary and support for the **Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico** and their **application (#404) to be recognized as a separate Apache tribe as others have been in New Mexico**. Their plight as well as their years of research and devoted, patient digging into archives, maps, reservations that were created but never fully acknowledged, treaties that were withdrawn or never utilized or just *terreno* (territory) used by their people outside of the reservation system are keys to it all. These individuals also realize that they are not going to retrieve their ancestral lands for themselves. The world's history has proven that wars and lines drawn on paper change over time what once was. However, as new information is discovered or re-discovered, is it not possible to acknowledge and therefore recognize this particular group of Apaches as the 24th tribal entity here in NM and to assist them, when possible, in educational and work opportunities?

There are innumerable Native Americans who did not live on reservations even after the reservation system was developed by the United States. Previously in Mexico there was a similar system under Spain, and then Mexico. However, many refused to live as *reservation Indians* but rather preferred being independent and creative on their own. They are not asking for welfare or handouts, but a hand up to fairness and tribal unity.

Their history is significant. The "Gila" Apaches should be recognized as a tribal unit much like the Lipan, Jicarilla, Mescalero, Chiricahua or Western Apache. Their request before you should be approved as it would help in officially regaining their family histories and their tribal affiliation as proven by the many documents and maps submitted. It would be another completed piece of the puzzle of Apache history.

Please allow them this opportunity. Please read their documentation of family rancherías, farms or land used for gathering of Mescal and other traditional sources of sustenance and religious places of great importance to their lives as well as their once prosperous farms and ranches long part of their family life and tradition. We owe them that recognition by a federal government that often forgets that they are a proud people, and through their own research now ask for this federal acknowledgment. It is long overdue.

Noted author Dr. Paul Conrad, states in his book *The Apache Diaspora*, "The Chihene Nde Nation, meanwhile, which includes the descendants of Apaches who eluded the forced removals of the late nineteenth century, continues to seek recognition from both state and federal officials." Many consider this identification as a matter of historical justice and a crucial step in preserving their cultural heritage.

Isn't it time that this tribal entity having sought to educate the world about their forgotten existence be granted this recognition? What better occasion to do so than on the 100th Anniversary of the sacred Gila Wilderness? Aldo Leopold would agree too because he appreciated the diversity and rugged beauty of the land, as did the Gila Apaches who rode, farmed and lived within its canyons and forests.

Respectfully,

Lynda A. Sánchez

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