

Department of the Interior
Office of the Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs
Attention: Office of Federal Acknowledgment
Mail Stop 4071 MIB
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

July 10 2024
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DOI/OS/AS-IA/OFA
Washington, DC

Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico – Personal Letter of Support

Dear OFA,

I, Franklyn Tranquilino Telles, am a direct descendant of the Gila Apache, also known as the Chihene Nde (“People of the Red Paint”). My father and his brothers, who were all from southern New Mexico since time immemorial, were promised the lands of their ancestors by Spain, Mexico, and the United States of America. During World War II, my father and his brothers heroically went overseas to defend the freedoms of the world. When they returned from victory over tyranny, their GI Bills were denied, their homelands were confiscated by the domestic governing authorities, and they were forcefully removed and relocated to California. Throughout my childhood, my father and his brothers preserved our unique culture by attending Powwows, fulfilling ceremonies, and holding meetings with elders. Since their passing, I have inherited the poverty that the governing authorities unjustly placed upon my family and that of my tribe. I will continue to pursue justice and pass these stories to my children and their children's children.

For these personal reasons and for the people of my tribe, I urge the OFA to re-acknowledge the historical significance of the Gila Apache (Chihene Nde) and the value of their presence in the Gila region. My tribe has a rich history, having signed multiple treaties with Spain, Mexico, and the United States under the names of the Rio Mimbres and Rio Gila Apaches and the Mimbres Bands of Gila Apaches. Their historical presence and contributions to the region are undeniable and deserve recognition.

On February 15, 2024, the OFA approved the submission of our tribe, known as the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico, to participate in the Department of the Interior's administrative process. As part of this process, I would like to provide additional evidence and examples to support our petition for federal recognition.

Our tribe has maintained a continuous presence in west-central and southwest New Mexico, despite the consolidation of Apache tribes on reservations and the exile of others from the region. We have preserved our unique cultural practices, including our traditional language, crafts, and songs. For instance, our tribe gathers annually in the tradition of our ancestors, as documented in the 1850s by our U.S. Indian Agent, Michael Steck. During these gatherings, we engage in traditional ceremonies, share oral histories, and celebrate our cultural heritage.

Furthermore, our petition includes evidence of our direct lineage to the treaty signers with the U.S. in the 1852 Treaty with the Apaches, the 1853 Treaty with the Rio Mimbres and Rio Gila

Apaches, and the 1855 Treaty with the Mimbres Bands of Gila Apache. After the closing of the Tularosa Valley Indian Agency in 1874, our tribe remained separated in our agricultural villages in the Greater Gila and Mimbres region, Southwest New Mexico along the Rio Grande, and northern Mexico. We continued to farm and ranch in our ancestral territories, maintaining our cultural heritage amidst economic changes from a subsistence to a cash economy.

While our tribe had been recognized for almost 80 years before the U.S. government removed our name from the National List of Indian Tribes in 1941, treating us differently than reservation Apaches, we have never wavered in our commitment to preserving our identity and traditions. We have submitted evidence for all seven criteria outlined in the administrative process, but we believe our unambiguous previous federal acknowledgment and status as a historical American Indian tribe should be given due consideration.

Given our tribe's unique circumstances and the injustices we have faced, we respectfully request that the OFA assess our petition based on the minimum three criteria described in 25 CFR Part 83, as permitted for tribes with unambiguous previous federal acknowledgment.

Additionally, I would like to emphasize our willingness to cooperate fully with the OFA's administrative process and provide any additional documentation or evidence required to substantiate our claims. We have the support of academic institutions and Native American organizations that can attest to the legitimacy of our historical lineage and cultural practices.

The OFA should not base its decision solely on the opinion of any Apache tribe elsewhere in the United States, as our tribe has a distinct identity and separate history from any current reservation Apache tribe. We were once recognized by the federal government, and we are now seeking to correct a historical mistake and regain our rightful place among the acknowledged tribes of this nation.

I implore the OFA to carefully consider the merits of our petition and the historical injustices faced by the Chihene Nde Nation. Granting us federal recognition would not only acknowledge our rich cultural heritage but also serve as a step towards reconciliation and promoting self-determination for our people.

Very Respectfully,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Franklyn Tranquilino Telles.

Franklyn Tranquilino Telles
Member of the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico

Attachments omitted

- OFA