

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY -- 1115 West Venice Blvd., Los Angeles 15

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Los Angeles Chapter of The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) today announced formation of a subcommittee to support the Hopi Indians of Arizona in their "land and life" dispute with the Federal Government. CORE will send a fact-finding team to Arizona to investigate the central issues in the long-standing, complex dispute. Team will also organize support in communities adjacent to Hopi Land, will present their findings to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and negotiate grievances of the impoverished Hopi People who are presently without recognized representation.

CORE, concurrently, is contacting other civil rights and civil liberties organizations to obtain widest possible support on this issue.

A background statement on the Hopi-Government dispute is attached.

If additional information is required, please contact Silvia Richards (DI-79382) or Lil Neville (NO-12624).

## BACKGROUND ON HOPI DISPUTE

The Hopi People have never entered into a treaty with any Western Government from the time of the Spanish Conquest to the present, nor have they been conquered by any. Spain tried and failed. The Mexican Government and later the Government of the United States did not try. The Hopi have maintained, to the present day, the sovereignty of Hopi Land, their name for the Hopi Indian Reservation in Arizona. In spite of the absence of any treaty and possessing no rights of conquest, both the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the United States Attorney General have denied the Hopi claim of sovereignty and have treated the Hopi as wards of the United States Government.

In respect to sovereignty, the Handbook of the United States Federal Laws (Chapter 7, pages 122-3) states: "From the earliest years of the Republic the Indian tribes have been recognized as distinct, independent, political communities, and as such, qualified to exercise powers of self government, not by virtue of any delegation of powers from the Federal Government, but rather by reason of their tribal sovereignty."

The stakes in the dispute, according to Hopi spokesmen, are land and life.

LAND: Hopi Territory Reassigned to Navaho

Dispute between Hopi and the Federal Government reached a critical stage recently when the U.S. Congress enacted legislation co-sponsored by Senator Barry Goldwater (R., Arizona) and then-Representative, now-Secretary of Interior, Stewart Udall, which enabled the Federal Courts to transfer large areas of Hopi territory to the surrounding Navaho Reservation. Reason for the transfer, Hopi spokesmen contend, is the desire to obtain rights to oil and mineral deposits. In recent years

Navaho have granted such rights, in spite of considerable internal opposition. The Hopi People have never done so. Prospecting operations were begun on this Hopi territory even in advance of the land transfer.

LIFE: Bureau of Indian Affairs Subvert Hopi Customs

In addition to the land transfer, the Federal Government has maintained continuing pressure on the Hopi People to abandon their cultural, religious, and political traditions, which, to the Hopi, is to abandon life.

Issues are numerous and complex, having both moral and legal implications. A central grievance of the Hopi People is against the Hopi Tribal Council, a de facto creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This Council, by admission of a former council chairman, is representative of something less than 15% of the Hopi People, yet is the only spokesman recognized by the Federal Government.

Putting aside legal issues, the genesis of the grievance against the Council rests in differing concepts of democracy.

Traditionally, Hopi have governed themselves by a form of direct democracy requiring unanimous consent, a form similar to that used by the Society of Friends. Hopi leaders, appointed by their predecessors in accordance with religious custom, hold periodic assemblies open to male and female, children and adults, where issues are discussed and debated, discussion continuing until such time as, in theory, a unanimous concensus is arrived at, and, in practice, until the overwhelming majority are in accord. The Hopi People prefer this brand of democracy to the representative brand the Federal Government prefers to impose on them.

According to Hopi spokesmen, the Hopi Tribal Council was the outgrowth of this conflict. In a Government-sponsored election to establish the Council as the ruling body of the Hopi People, an estimated 85% refused to

participate -- a refusal which the Government, in at least two of the three districts, preferred to interpret as indicating endorsement. Following the election, the Government then recognized the Council as a duly constituted authority empowered to enter into any and all agreements and to enact and enforce such laws as the Secretary of Interior deems proper in regard to the Hopi People. The vast majority of the Hopi have, to the present, for a period of almost twenty years, steadfastly refused to vote for representatives to this Council, the representatives serving on the mandate of never more than an estimated 8% of the adult population.

Essential point in the conflict, according to Hopi spokesmen, is that the Hopi People as a whole are well aware that there are two sets of leaders -- the puppets set up by the Federal Government against their traditional leaders -- and the traditional leaders which are supported by the Hopi Independent Nation.

Hopi spokesmen assert that not only is the Government-imposed Council inconsistent with the centuries-old political traditions and religious beliefs, but also that its establishment is a direct violation of Hopi sovereignty. They further assert that the Council was originally created for and continues to serve the specific purpose of rubber stamping decisions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, thereby lending the appearance of legality and democratic consent to illegal actions against the Hopi People. In those rare instances when even the Council refuses to endorse the Federal position, they are usually over ridden by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

#### Hopi Dedicated to Non Violence

The Hopi People are by religious conviction non violent and have successfully throughout their history defended their sovereignty without resort

to warfare. However, time and again they have been forced into direct, non violent action in defense of their rights. According to spokesmen, in recent years many Hopi have been imprisoned, assaulted, branded, and starved by the Federal Government in attempts to exact compliance. Women have been publically disrobed and humiliated by government employees. The Hopi resistance has continued.

The Hopi have now appealed to CORE for assistance and support of such new actions as are required at this critical juncture in the defense of their land and life. CORE, also dedicated to the principal of non-violent, direct action, will now determine the extent to which it may effectively participate with the Hopi People in support of an issue which reflects upon the rights and dignity of all Americans.

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