



The Wabanaki Nations in Maine Stand United and In Solidarity with Those Seeking Justice and Racial Equality

The Wabanaki Nations in Maine -- the Houlton Band of Maliseet, Aroostook Band of Micmac, Passamaquoddy at Motahkomikuk, Passamaquoddy at Sipayik, and the Penobscot Nation -- stand united and in solidarity with those seeking justice and racial equality. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers is the latest in a pattern of black men and women dying in police custody at the hands of police officers. These incidents are commanding the world's attention now that they are recorded on cell phone cameras by bystanders. These videos, which are traumatizing to view, confirm the continued systemic and deep-rooted racism that exist in this country. Not even a month prior to Mr. Floyd's death the country witnessed the apparent hunting and shooting of Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed 25-year-old black man out for a jog, by white men. The killing of Mr. Arbery occurred in February and no meaningful investigation took place until May when the video footage of the shooting was released and the public outcry pressured the Georgia legal system to take action. In addition, Breonna Taylor, who would have turned 27-years-old today, was killed in her home months ago by police who have yet to be charged with any crimes.

Much of the country is burning literally and figuratively. People from all races and backgrounds have mobilized for justice and equality under the law because they are tired of the continued abuse that our criminal justice system allows. The message is simple: Black Lives Matter and people of color matter. All of human life has innate value, but this current resistance and activism taking over our media airwaves and society, even as we all grapple with a pandemic, is focused on the dangerous plague of black lives being snuffed out in broad daylight by those who are supposed to be protecting and serving them.

The Wabanaki Nations believe in having strong and collaborative relationships with law enforcement and public safety officers that serve our communities. We rely on our public safety departments to keep us safe and we respect the difficult jobs they do and that all police and first responders in America undertake. Each of our communities has police, fire, and game warden services that often employ tribal citizens and non-Natives who live in our communities. We believe in giving these

officers all the proper training and culturally sensitive protocols to use when responding to incidents.

We are all plagued with criminal activity like drug abuse and sales, domestic violence, and many other dangerous activities. However, criminal activity does not justify the taking of someone's life. "Innocent until proven guilty" is supposed to be the foundation on which this country's justice system is built. But the continued killing of unarmed black Americans by police officers proves a serious flaw continues to exist that our government leaders are failing to address.

Last year, the Maine Legislature passed a law at the request of the Wabanaki Nations providing us a seat on the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Board so that we can share our cultural values and individual needs with the State of Maine's police system. We asked for this because our own indigenous women and girls have suffered from a lack of justice and equality in the investigation of their murders and disappearances. But more needs to be done to fix the longstanding racial inequities that exist in our criminal justice system, and we call on the leadership of this State to ensure that all communities of color are represented on the Justice Academy Board. We call on the leaders of our State to engage in more dialogue with our communities of color so that together we can identify actions for meaningful change.

No lives are disposable. All life is sacred. Our focus and energy should be with the most vulnerable among us. We share a strong passion and heartbreak over the racial injustices eating away at this country. We stand in solidarity with our black brothers and sisters, and it is time for true and meaningful change that brings about racial equality within our justice system.

In Brotherhood,

Clarissa Sabattis, Chief
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

William Nicholas, Chief
Passamaquoddy at Motahkomikuk

Marla Dana, Chief
Passamaquoddy at Sipayik

Charlie Peter-Paul, Chief
Aroostook band of Micmac

Kirk E. Francis, Chief
Penobscot Nation

