



# USET

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## Statement by USET Sovereignty Protection Fund in Response to Unrest in America

America is suffering and her people are hurting, angry, and concerned about our fragility and our collective future as a nation. We have reached a tipping point that has long been bubbling under the surface. For the last several days, we have watched the explosion of centuries-old frustrations and tensions, rooted in injustice, erupt in protest and chaos in communities across this country. Unbelievably, this current crisis is unfolding on top of the months-long stress resulting from a once-in-a-generation worldwide pandemic. This pandemic has challenged us all both personally and professionally, taxed us to the point of physical and mental exhaustion, and has exposed disparities and inequities that have long existed within this country.

As the indigenous people of these lands, we stand in unity alongside our black relatives who have long suffered at the hands of injustice in this country. We understand and relate to your pain and outrage. We stand with you in your just and righteous cause to bring awareness, truth, and long overdue positive change to your American experience. We too seek the same and we understand the importance of standing with one another against injustice.

Injustice in America is not a new reality. In fact, it predates the founding of this nation. It was birthed as its original sin; the sin of greed and superiority that led to the genocide of our indigenous relatives. It is grounded in the arrival of the first explorers who set foot on our shores and quickly embarked upon a centuries long campaign. A campaign to oppress others to achieve gain for themselves. A campaign to secure the rights and privileges of those it believed to be more deserving than others, despite the principles reflected within its Constitution. A campaign that has yet to end. This campaign started with indigenous peoples, and was followed by many other unconscionable, deplorable, and despicable acts for which this nation has yet to hold itself accountable. The impacts and consequences of this original sin continue to be at the root of our challenges to this day, not only within Indian country, but also as a nation.

While we have made minimal progress towards a more enlightened and just society over time, this progress has been impeded by our failure as a society to properly identify, acknowledge, own, and teach these truths. In doing this, we mask the roots of injustice in this country. For those that benefit from this fiction, the result has been unrecognized privilege and entitlement and institutionalized ignorance.

For those oppressed by it, the result has been a pattern and unending cycle of multi-generational trauma, institutionalized racism and discrimination, hate and bigotry, health and social disparities, inequality, inequity, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and invisibility. Until we demand honesty and confront our past and

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origins as a country, we can never heal from its roots of injustice. The collective citizenry of this country must denounce and move away from the comfort of tacit complicity, willful disregard and blindness, tolerance, and indifference to the many ills that continue to plague our country. We must expect and demand better—from ourselves, our families, our communities.

Despite the truths of our past, and our continued challenges that divide us, we have the gift of opportunity and the power of choice; a choice to be better than we have been, to be better than we are. But that begins with a willingness to take an honest and introspective look in the mirror as a nation. In doing so, we will move closer to a common understanding of who we are, which is necessary to forge ahead with a common cause and a common purpose. While it is important to have respect for that which distinguishes us from one another, it is equally important that we find a way to focus on that which binds us in common as children of the Creator—as fellow human beings, as global citizens, as citizens of this great democratic experiment who are all deserved of human rights, equal opportunity, dignity, and respect. In doing so, we will begin to move beyond the “other” mentality that separates and divides us and remember that we are all related.

We must move beyond the ignorance that resides within narrow mindedness of one’s limited understanding of the world and humanity, as we seek out our truth. We must no longer allow for loving and innocent hearts and minds to be corrupted with hate, greed, and intolerance. We must inspire and encourage empathy and compassion. In doing so, we will discover that we are part of something larger, something greater than ourselves.

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads in our democratic experiment. This is the moment where the experiment fails and disintegrates, or the moment that we will ultimately forge ahead stronger. As part of our continued evolution as a country, as a people, the time has arrived for an awakening, or reawakening, of consciousness and morality. Until we all see a bit of ourselves in each other, until we share a common understanding of our journey as a nation, until we find common ground in our dreams and aspirations, we will continue to be misled and defined by our fears and selfish interests. We will continue to turn a blind eye to the ills of our society by standing in silence. We will continue to see those not like us as others. And we will continue to justify, rationalize, and participate in that which separates and divides.

The opportunity is now for us all to commit ourselves to be agents of healing and change to ensure that the path we choose at this fork in the road will lead us to greatness, which fundamentally includes true unity and justice for all. We must all take a firmer stand on the ground of righteousness, reverence, respect, and regard for all of humanity. It is up to each and every one of us to prove to the world, to prove to our Creator, that we have not lost our collective soul as a society, that we are not morally bankrupt.

We are better than what we have been and have the potential to be so much better. We must harness this time of challenge and upheaval in our nation to achieve truth and reconciliation with the stains on its character and integrity. Only then can we forge ahead together as a united people by removing the many ills of injustice that continue to impede our ability to achieve the ideals and principles we set forth so many years ago. As stated by the Reverend Martin Luther King, “Justice too long delayed is justice denied.” Now is the time to end the delay and denial. Now is the moment to make the right choice.

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The USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty (30) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

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