



WESTERN SHOSHONE DEFENSE PROJECT

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United States Faces Charges of Human Rights Abuses Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to Consider Case Involving Native Americans' Fight to Save Land and Culture

Crescent Valley, NV—After more than 26 years of battling the U.S. government for ancestral Western Shoshone lands, Mary and Carrie Dann may finally get their day in “court.” The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has ruled that the Danns’ allegations against the United States meet the criteria for human rights violations and that the case will be brought before the Commission. In support of the Dann’s position, the Yomba Shoshone Tribe and the Ely Shoshone Tribe have both intervened in the case.

The Commission’s decision opens the way for review of one of the most fundamental principles of federal policy in regard to Indian lands. The case charged the United States with domestic human rights abuses as the government is calling attention to human rights practices around the world.

Since 1973, the United States has kept up a campaign of harassment and intimidation of the Danns and other Western Shoshone in regard to Western Shoshone ancestral lands throughout Nevada’s eastern half. Ignoring a federal treaty which acknowledges this land as belonging to the Western Shoshone, the U.S. has declared it federal property and has seized the Danns’ livestock, arrested their brother, and continues to threaten them with huge fines, imprisonment, impoundment of their livestock, and confiscation of their property.

“This is the last and final attempt to destroy our ways of life,” said Carrie Dann. “And we will not cede or give away under pressure our birthrights, our inherent rights to the United States.”

Earlier this year, the Commission issued precautionary measures against the United States—requesting the U.S. government to halt further action pending its investigation of the Danns’ claims. Despite an executive order to “respect and implement its obligations under the international human rights treaties to which it is a party,” the United States failed to comply with the Commission’s request. Under the current decision, this request remains in effect.

The Dann family has been living, hunting and grazing livestock on Western Shoshone ancestral lands in Nevada for generations. Their economic and cultural survival is entirely dependent upon the land and its resources. The lands are recognized as Western Shoshone lands and guaranteed to the Western Shoshone in the Treaty of Ruby Valley. Although they were never ceded or sold—nor were the Western Shoshone ever conquered—the United States claims the land as “public land.”

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has repeatedly issued notices of trespassing against
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the Danns, has assessed more than \$1,000,000 in fees and penalties for what it calls “unauthorized use and grazing,” and has twice impounded Dann livestock. At the same time the BLM has permitted some of the largest gold-mining companies in the world to open up mines on the Danns’ and other Western Shoshone ancestral lands —activities the traditional Western Shoshone strongly oppose.

The U.S. has long taken the position that it can unilaterally extinguish the rights of indigenous people to their land without due process. The Western Shoshone case challenges the United States to reform this and other discriminatory legal doctrines that have denied basic constitutional and human rights to Indian peoples for generations.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is a body of the Organization of American States (OAS) that was created to promote the observance and defense of human rights by member states. All the countries of North, Central and South America, except Cuba, are members of the OAS. As a member of the OAS, the United States is bound by the human rights principles that are outlined in the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man. The OAS is now considering a proposed American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

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