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O'odham to National Guard: 'We do not want you on our lands'



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By Ofelia Rivas©, O'odham

Photo 1: National Guardsmen on Tohono O'odham land, south of Sells, Arizona, in 2007 aiding in the construction of the vehicle barrier at the US/Mexico border/Photo copyright Brenda Norrell.

Photo 2: Ofelia Rivas on the border/Copyright Jason Jaacks
Censored News

<http://www.bsnorrell.blogspot.com>

Ofelia Rivas, traditional O'odham living on the border, released a statement to the National Guard, who are to arrive on the US/Mexico border in Arizona on Monday.

To the United States National Guard arriving in O'odham Lands,

We are not compliant people, we are people with great dignity and confidence. We are a people of endurance and have a long survival history. We are people that have lived here for thousands of years. We have our own language, we have our own culture and traditions.

You are coming to my land, you may find me walking on my land, sitting on my land and just going about my daily life. I might be sitting on the mountain top, do not disturb me, I am praying the way my ancestors did for thousands of years. I might be out collecting what may be strange to you but it might be food to me or medicine for me.

Sometimes I am going to the city to get a burger or watch a movie or just to resupply my kitchen and refrigerator. Some of us live very much like you do and some of us live very simple lives. Some of may not have computers or scanners or televisions or a vehicle but some of us do.

The other thing is that some of us are light-skinned O'odham and some of us are darker-skinned O'odham. Some of us spend a lot of time indoors or outdoors. Sometimes my mother might be of a different Nation (refers to different tribal Nation) or sometimes our father is Spanish or we may have some European grandmother or grandfather.

If you want to question who we are, we all have learned to carry our Tohono O'odham Nation Tribal I.D. Card. It is a federally-issued card which is recognized by the federal government which is your boss. This card identifies us and by law this is the only requirement needed to prove who we are. We do not have United States passports because most of us were born at home and do not have documents, but that does not make us "undocumented people." Your boss, the Department of Homeland Security, and the government of the Tohono O'odham Nation have negotiated an agreement which is, our tribal I.D. card is our identification card and no other document is required.

The O'odham, (the People) as we call ourselves, have been here to witness the eruption of volcanoes that formed the lands we live on. We have special places that hold our great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandparents remains, our lands are a special and holy place to us. Some of us still make journeys to these places to pray. Some of these places hold holy objects that maintain specific parts of our beliefs. When you see us out on the land do not assume we are in the drug business or human smuggling business. Sometimes we are out on the land hunting for rabbits or deer or javelina to feed our families. We may be carrying a hunting weapon please do not harm me, my family loves me and depends on me.

When you are out on our land, be mindful that you are visitor on our lands, be respectful, be courteous and do not harm anything.

Sometimes you may see us gather all night long, dancing and sometimes we are crying loudly, do not approach us or disturb us in anyway, we are honoring a dead relative and preparing them for burial. Sometimes we are conducting a healing ceremony out on the land, do not approach us or disturb us. Sometimes we may be singing and dancing all night long, these are our ceremonies that we have conducted for thousands of years. We are not behaving in a suspicious nature, this is our way of life.

As original people of the lands we honor everything on our lands and we regard all as a part of our sacred lives, do not kill any plants and animals or people on our lands. Do not litter our lands with your trash. When we visit other peoples lands and cities and homes we do not litter or leave behind trash.

We might be driving our cars, sometimes old, sometimes very new, do not try to run us off the roads or tailgate me. I value my life and my family, I might have a newborn in my car or my grandmother or my mother and father, my brothers and sister or my aunts and uncles or my friends. These are all important people to me and I do not want to see them hurt or dead.

If I seem like I do not understand what you are saying, please call the Tohono O'odham Police and ask for an O'odham speaking officer to come and assist you. I might be laughing at you if you talk to me in English, I don't know what you are saying and I am laughing out of nervousness and fear because you are armed.

If you are afraid of us and draw your weapons on me, I am more afraid of you because I am unarmed and my family is in the vehicle with me or they are in my house when you come into my house. Sometimes my house might be in poor condition but it is my home, it is my sanctuary, be respectful. Sometime there are elders in my house that are already afraid of armed people in our communities such as the border patrol and other federal agents.

There are some people that do drug business or human smuggling business but we are not all doing that, we are not all criminals. Do not treat us like criminals.

We might call you killers and murderers as you just came from killing people. To the O'odham you are a dangerous person, to walk onto our lands bringing fresh death on your person is very destructive to us as a people. You may have diseases we do not know, illnesses of your mind that

you might inflict on us. Please do not approach us if you are afflicted with fresh death.

Remember we do not want you on our lands, we did not invite you to our lands.

Do remember that we have invited allies that will be witnessing your conduct on our lands and how you treat our people.

From the the O'odham Lands
Ofelia Rivas