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USA: Amnesty International urges Clinton to grant pardon to Leonard Peltier

Amnesty International is today calling on President Clinton to grant Leonard Peltier presidential pardon before leaving office. Leonard Peltier, a Native American Indian, has been in prison for 23 years for the murder of two Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents.

In a letter sent today, Amnesty International urges President Clinton in his last few months of power to free a prisoner whose guilt has long been in question.

"Since all of Leonard Peltier's legal appeals have been exhausted, it is our firm view that an act of clemency is not only timely, but a necessary step in the name of justice," said Pierre Sané, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

Amnesty International believes that the evidence that Peltier shot the two FBI agents is far from conclusive. One of the organization's pivotal concerns was that his extradition from Canada was on the basis of a testimony by an alleged eye-witness who was coerced by the FBI into making false statements. In a recent public hearing in Toronto, Canada, Myrtle Poor Bear reasserted that her original claim -- that she was Peltier's girlfriend and that she saw him shoot the agents -- was false, and was a result of months of threats and harassment from FBI agents. She had also said that she had been 80 kilometers (50 miles) away from the scene at the time of the shooting.

Amnesty International has repeatedly voiced serious concerns over the fairness of the legal proceedings which led to Leonard Peltier's conviction and sentence, and believes that political factors may have influenced the way in which the case was conducted.

The organization has monitored Leonard Peltier's case extensively over many years, sending observers to his trial in 1977, and to numerous subsequent appeal and evidentiary hearings. These appeals, however, have failed to dispel substantial doubts about the fairness of the legal proceedings.

In June 2000 Amnesty International attended the interim parole hearing where the Parole Commission stood by their 1993 decision that the next full parole hearing should be in 2008.

Background

The two FBI agents were shot at point-blank range after being wounded in a gunfight involving the American Indian Movement (AIM) in which Leonard Peltier was a leading activist. After fleeing to Canada, Leonard Peltier was extradited to the USA and convicted of the murders in 1977.

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