



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Mary and Carrie Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation (USA)

(1993)



"...for exemplary courage and perseverance in asserting the rights of indigenous people to their land."

Mary & Carrie Dann

The sisters Mary and Carrie Dann are traditional Western Shoshone women and the major leaders in their people's political and legal battle to retain their ancestral lands. Since 1972, they have been waging a battle with the US government through litigation and civil disobedience.

The Territory of the Western Shoshone Nation as defined in the Treaty of Ruby Valley, which was concluded with the US government in 1868, included two-thirds of the State of Nevada and small portions of California, Idaho and Utah. This treaty was not a treaty of cession, but of peace and friendship, granting the United States safe passage through Shoshone territory and allowing (gold) mining on their land.

The Treaty of Ruby Valley - like other treaties between the United States government and Indian nations - has been abrogated and undermined by US domestic law. Through different legislative acts almost 90 per cent of Western Shoshone land and resources gradually came under the control of the US Department of the Interior and its branches like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the Department of Energy. In 1951 the Nevada atomic test site was established, where the United States and Britain conducted more than 100 atmospheric tests - more than have been carried out anywhere else in the world. In all, 950 nuclear bombs have been detonated on Shoshone land since 1951, the most recent in April 1990.

In 1979 the US Court of Claims awarded \$26 million for the taking of Western Shoshone land, but more than 80 per cent of the Western Shoshone people voted against accepting the money. Instead, the award was accepted by the Department of Interior. Since the Western Shoshone did not sell or cede their land, they requested that the US observe the Treaty of Ruby Valley. In December 1991, the US 9th Circuit Court ruled that the claims award, despite its non-acceptance by the Shoshone, had nevertheless extinguished their subsistence rights - for example, to hunt, fish and gather food - which were guaranteed in the 1868 Treaty.

Mary and Carrie Dann have their ranch in Crescent Valley in the heart of Western Shoshone territory. In 1973 they were approached by the BLM to apply for grazing permits and to pay grazing fees. They argued that their cattle were grazing on Western Shoshone territory, yet the following year they were sued for trespassing. Since then, with full backing from the Western Shoshone National Council, the Dann sisters have struggled to maintain their way of life against repeated attempts by the BLM to impound their livestock.

Mary Dann died in 2005 in an accident.

Quotation

"We, the human children of this Earth, all have our own cultures and traditions, languages, and we all like to keep them, as they identify us as one of the many kinds of peoples of the Earth. Our Mother, the earth (land) gives us all the necessities of life: it feeds us, gives us clothes, shelter and cradles us. The US Government is acting like a dictator in just taking our land. I have voiced again and again, Western Shoshone land - our Mother Earth - is not for sale."

Carrie Dann

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