

SPIRIT

Center for Support and Protection of
Indian Religions and Indigenous Traditions
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October 6, 2022

To: The Leaders of the Mankind Project

We are a group of Native American elders from many tribes who are aware of your appropriation, disrespect, misuse, and misleading statements regarding the sacred Inipi (*sweat lodge*) ceremony, (or as you call it, *Purification and Renewal Ceremony*), and other elements of Lakota traditions being used in inappropriate and disrespectful ways.

Excerpts from your organization's mission statement clearly state "the Mankind Project was founded on Core Values of Accountability, Integrity, Community, Authenticity, Inclusion, Service and IMPACT- Men act on their individual and shared responsibility for the future of humanity."

With that as your vision, "Where men are fully accountable and take responsibility for their decisions."

THEN:

- Why is the Mankind Project violating Native American rights, laws, and religious practices?
- Why does the Mankind Project continue to cause physical, emotional and spiritual trauma to Native Americans and Indigenous Nations?

The Mankind Project has made millions of dollars and trained hundreds of non-natives in conducting a version of the *sacred sweat lodge ceremony*; thereby misleading the more than 80,000 men who have come to MKP seeking an authentic spiritual awakening.

The permission you claim to have is not substantiated or approved by Lakota leaders. No "All Nations" protocol for non-natives was supported for the Mankind Project. The leaders of the Lakota Nation have no knowledge of such an agreement. You claim that a Lakota man named Mel Lone Hill gave permission many years ago for white men to conduct the *sweat lodge ceremony*, however, he is deceased and unable to validate such claims, and no living leaders are aware of or support such permissions.

In a recent email, the leaders of the MKP "Lodge Keepers Society" (LKS) imply that they have permission on behalf of the Lakota tribe from a descendant of Mel Lone Hill, a man named Jason Lone Hill. This is **NOT TRUE**. Jason Lone Hill does not function as a chief in the Lakota culture, or participate in community ceremonies. Jason works in a detention facility and previously was a tribal police officer. He is not a ceremonial leader and has **no authority** to give you permission to take a sacred ceremony from the Lakota people and misuse it. According to a recent email from LKS, you imply that a Sundancer has granted you permission. This is also **NOT TRUE**. Sundancers are participants in a high ceremony and have no authority to grant permission to anyone to use the "sweat lodge" ceremony in any format. The Lakota Nation does in fact claim the "*Sweat Lodge*" ceremony: it was given to them in a sacred way and is protected under many decrees and laws.

We understand that the New Warrior Training Adventure was the brainchild of Rich Tosi, Bill Kauth, and Ron Hering and underwent many modifications with ritual, ceremony, and initiation. However, you took the use of “animal totems” and “spiritual names,” such as Crazy Horse (a historical figure), from the Native American culture. Additionally, your use of a Medicine pouch, and the symbolism associated with it, is egregious and disrespectful. The fact that you gift each participant with such a sacred object is appropriation of the worst kind. You have also used the “Talking Stick” to indicate who has the floor to speak and say “Aho” to indicate that a man has finished speaking, and included a Native American purification ritual, the “*sweat lodge*.” When MKP was confronted by Indigenous people for MKP’s use of the Native American word “Aho”, your organization disingenuously decided to create an acronym of A.H.O. (Authentic, Honest, & Open). Your organization has profited from these practices without conscious thought as to the consequences of these actions on Native Peoples.

Further, the founders of the Mankind Project appropriated Indian-style rituals to be used in the Warrior Weekends. Bill Kauth brought back the idea of a “*sweat lodge*” after attending one conducted by Charles Chips. After this experience, the founders agreed to include this in the Warrior Weekend and Bill performed the ritual by the “seat of his pants” admitting it in an article published by Hal Klegman, in 1985. The Founders stated that they were willing to “sit and pretend to do it.” In many verified instances, the LKS founder Mitchell, and other leaders of the Lodge Keepers Society have performed these rituals while intoxicated.

We demand that the Mankind Project immediately cease and desist all use of Native American rituals and traditions, including the Purification and Renewal Ceremony, cease the use of pseudo-spiritual names, and immediately DISSOLVE the Lodge Keepers Society.

The Mankind Project is in violation of your own core values, vision statement, and mission statement. For many years, repeated requests from Indigenous people to eliminate the “*sweat lodge*,” a Native American ritual, from your curriculum have been met with multiple refusals: refusals to allow distribution of a video in which several Indigenous members protested cultural appropriation, refusals to hear Indigenous perspectives external to MKP, claims that appropriation of Native American rituals do not apply to your organization, and verbal and written attacks towards many of your Indigenous members by an MKP Chairman and the founder of the Lodge Keepers Society. You are violating several laws, decrees and proclamations including several from the Lakota Nation, from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), from the United Nations, and by Chief Arvol Looking Horse and other Ceremonial Chiefs from many tribes. The ManKind Project is in violation of the U.S. law known as NAGPRA, which “includes protection of Native religions, ceremonial practices and cultural heritage.” In addition to the overriding moral implications for preserving Native cultures, there are practical reasons for doing so. You have failed to consult with Native American tribal nations when implementing or conducting rituals. You have chosen to continue to harm the sweat lodge ritual, the men who attend it, and the men who inappropriately learn to conduct the *sweat lodge* ritual.

We understand that you created a protocol that speaks of having a specific ‘*sweat lodge*’ ceremony created for the Mankind Project by Curits Mitchell and Mel Lonehill. However, the Lakota Nation goes to great lengths to protect its way of life and would not now or in the future sanction a special ceremony for non-natives, as that would go against the clear declarations of the Lakota Nation on this matter.

On behalf of the Indigenous elders signed here, we are formally taking back any perceived permission that the Mankind Project claims to have. We DO NOT SANCTION what your organization has been doing with our culture and traditions in the past, currently, or in the future.

We are sending this letter to the leaders of the Mankind Project in the hope and expectation that you will take immediate action, and that this situation can be resolved amicably. However, if you continue to misuse our spiritual traditions in any way from this day forward, we will organize protests at every sweatlodge and training that you conduct, and we will actively spread this information via social media platforms, indigenous organizations, newspaper organizations, civil rights groups, and leaders of tribes across the country, inviting them to join us in protest.

If you aren't sure about whether something is restricted or not, ask the Lakota Nation's legal entity. If people from the culture tell you that what you are doing is disrespectful, and you dismiss their concerns because you don't agree, that is appropriation. You have no authority to use an undocumented conversation as permission to use *the sweat lodge ceremony in perpetuity*.

Your Lodge Keepers Society states "you will remain willing to engage with others and continue to develop relationships with Indigenous Peoples in areas around the world." If your written word is true, we can be contacted at info@spiritprotection.org.

The initial signatories of this letter are listed below, and we will update our website as additional Indigenous people sign on.

Mato Ta Pejuta Wakan Najin
Verlinda Montoya RN, MH, MHSA
Tribal Member Picuris Pueblo
Lakota Adopted EagleElk Family
Spiritual Leader

Wounded Knee DeoCampo
AIM Advisor (American Indian Movement)
Me-Wuk Tribal Member
Activist for Indigenous Rights
Spiritual Leader

Chief John Bravehawk
Sundance Chief, Elder
Sicangu/Lakota Tribe
Rosebud Reservation

Nathen "Thunderheart" Costello
Oglala Sioux Omaha Tribal Member
AIM Representative
Omaha Reservation

Wilbur Morrison Sr
Oglala Sioux
Traditional Singer
Pine Ridge Reservation

Wambli Ho Waste "Jacob" Arapahoe
Oglala Sioux
Traditional Singer Ceremonial Leader
Pine Ridge Reservation

Sylvester Byrd
Traditional Singer
Oglala Sioux
Pine Ridge Reservation

Julia Jalalat LCSW
CEO, Therapist
Choctaw Tribal Member

Joey Silvas
Spiritual Leader
Wylacki Tribe Round Valley CA

Cecila Silvas
Pitt River Tribe
Northeast, Shasta County

Jaime Ceferino Rosario
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Heather Moss, Civil Rights Attorney
Attorney, Advisor, Litigator
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Dr Ellen Faryna
Psychologist
Adopted Pueblo Nation

Valentin Lopez
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
Tribal Chairman
Spiritual Leader