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MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

DOUGLAS SHARON  
DIRECTOR  
(Ret)

Adriaan Bronkhorst  
The Drug Peace Institute  
Utrecht, Holland

November 27, 2018

Dear Mr. Bronkhorst:

I am writing in support of the nomination of Susana Valadez for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. I have known Ms Valadez since 1975 when, as a UCLA graduate student, she began what was to become her life's work among the Wixárika or Huichol people of Mexico. In more than four decades of applied anthropology in her adopted homeland she has been a tireless cultural broker for the profound but beleaguered Huichol way of life. In this time while helping these people adapt to the pressures of modernization, Ms. Valadez has demonstrated that the Huichol have much to teach the modern world about living in a meaningful and sustainable relationship with Nakutsi Nakawe, their name for Gaia. In what follows, allow me to describe the many ways she has helped to preserve Huichol culture while at the same time making it more viable in the face of unfettered development.

Everything Ms. Valadez has done revolves around the non-profit Huichol Center for Cultural Survival and Traditional Arts. It is strategically located in Huejuquilla del Alto, the natural transit point for the Peyote Pilgrimage to and from Wirikuta, home of the gods and ancestors. The pilgrimage expresses the essence of Huichol spirituality. In addition to being a force in reinforcing Huichol identity and values, the Center serves as a buffer zone for Huichols from the isolated hinterland who are seeking work in the modern economy as the traditional sector becomes less and less viable. Another more informal function of the Center is political in nature as it seeks to orient elders and students to the principles of modern democracy in an effort to aid them in developing a more viable system of governance.

The two central projects of the Center which work hand in hand are the Blue Corn Mother Educational Project, which includes the Interactive Archive of Cultural Knowledge, and the Permaculture Demo Site. The education project's non-governmental school provides 50 five to 15-year-olds with a multi-pronged curriculum focused on Huichol oral traditions, cosmology, and ancient agricultural practices. It protects against language loss using teaching methodologies designed in collaborations between child-centered learning consultants and Huichol shamans and artists. The latter also provide the content for the ongoing Archive of Cultural Knowledge. Many of the teenagers at the

Center who have learned computer graphics in the school use the Archive's massive database to create schoolbooks, cards, and posters. In addition to use in the school curriculum, these products are available for sale--along with the famous Huichol yarn and beadwork-- in the growing local tourist market, illustrating a Center motto: "Hand-crafts, not hand-outs."

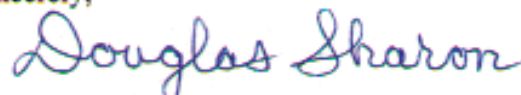
The self-sufficiency principle is also put into practice in the Center's sustainable agricultural project via bio-dynamic farming, permaculture techniques, and water reclamation "aguaponics." The latter technique is being used to counter the toxic effects of agri-business on local water supplies while the worm project recycles organic waste in earthworm bins to produce natural fertilizer. The blue corn grown on the farm provides the major product served at the Center's Blue Corn Mama Restaurant, a local tourist destination.

Overall, through a dual process of preservation and adaptation, the Huichol Cultural Center continues to make Huichol culture viable and self-supporting in the face of rapid and traumatic culture change.

One of Ms. Valadez's research interests is the deeply rooted shamanism of the Huichol region. Although I have never had a chance to visit Ms. Valadez in Mexico, since Latin American shamanism is my major research focus, over the years I have kept up with her work. This mutual interest led to a major collaborative project, "Mirrors of the Gods: Reflections of Huichol Reality," an exhibit held at the San Diego Museum of Man in the mid-1980s during my tenure as director. As the principal investigator on grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ms Valadez organized a team of scholars and Huichol consultants, the outcome of which was unequivocally the most successful exhibit hosted at the Museum of Man during my time there. Attendance for this exhibit established an all-time record which has yet to be surpassed. It was a testament to Ms Valadez's ability to overcome cultural barriers in communicating the essence of Huichol culture to a broad cross-section of American society.

In light of her unwavering advocacy and dedication to the cultural achievements and spiritual legacy of her adopted people, I strongly support the nomination of Ms. Valadez for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Sincerely,



Douglas Sharon, Ph.D.

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