

American Indians, Prayer Leaders Mark Anniversary of 'Trail of Tears'

During the Day of Remembrance, U.S. lawmakers apologized for the government's inhumane treatment of the Cherokee people.



[] Members of the Eastern and Western bands of Cherokee Indians, North Carolina lawmakers, prayer leaders and nearly 150 onlookers gathered May 30 in Murphy, N.C., to mark the 170th anniversary of the Trail of Tears.

The Day of Remembrance event, sponsored by Friends of Native America, took place within miles of Fort Butler, the site of the first roundup of approximately 3,000 Cherokees in preparation for their forced removal from their North Carolina homeland to Oklahoma Indian Territory. The Cherokee people called the journey the "Trail of Tears" because of the suffering it caused. Of the 15,000 forced to leave their land, approximately 4,000 died.

North Carolina state Sen. John Snow joined U.S. Rep. Roger West, also of North Carolina, in issuing an apology for the forced relocation that began in 1838. "On this Day of Remembrance, Rep. Roger West and I, your state senator, extend our heartfelt apology for the wrongful taking of the land of the Cherokee and for the inhumane way that the Cherokee people were gathered and forced to travel the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma," Snow told the crowd.

Clifton Pettit, a representative of the Western Band of Cherokee Indians, said he believed the lawmakers were sincere. "I believe ... they spoke from the heart," Pettit said. "They really meant what they were saying, so as a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, I really felt the words, and I felt them within. I really do believe that there is a lot of success and a lot of things are going to come out of this in the future."

The Day of Remembrance event was the result of a dream South African pastor Andre Vaynol had about the Trail of Tears.

Unfamiliar with American history, Vaynol researched the Trail of Tears and said God then told him that the cycles of drought in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee were due to the fact that government officials had not repented of the historic injustice.

“Today is the beginning of the end of an atrocity done many years ago, Vaynol told attendees. “We are going to see some blessings of God, not only upon the Cherokees but upon the people, especially the people in Murphy and especially the people in North Carolina.”

To continue the reconciliation that began during the Day of Remembrance and to help bring healing among Native people groups from around the world, a Restoration of the Nations prayer and worship event is being planned in Murphy, N.C., on Aug. 8. **—Paula Hornberger**