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To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter in support of the Native Nations, Native Voices Festival planned for July 2005. This festival will honor contemporary Native language writers of the Americas at a three day event in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As an anthropologist working in Chiapas, Mexico I can attest to the importance of this festival. While conducting research in Chiapas for the past twenty years I have been witness to the revitalization of Native languages among Mayas and other Native groups of that state. It has been inspiring to see increasing numbers of young and older people learning to read and write in their Native languages. In the process they have been reappropriating the written word in their ancestral languages as well as in Spanish. The plays, poems, stories, and other indigenous texts being produced in Chiapas and throughout the Americas express alternative perspectives on human experience that deserve a broad audience. These texts and their authors make significant contributions to intercultural communication and understanding among the diverse peoples of the Americas.

Anthologies and other books are beginning to make their way into bookstores, libraries and schools. For example, several of the contributors to a book I recently edited on women of Chiapas are Native women, among them Ruperta Bautista Vasquez, a Tzotzil woman poet and playwright. Bautista Vasquez has never had the opportunity to travel outside of her home state of Chiapas. She has been invited to attend the festival in Albuquerque. At the festival she will have the opportunity to meet other writers from indigenous communities throughout the Americas. This experience will provide her with inspiration, encouragement and points of comparison with her own life and work. She will take this experience back with her to Chiapas where she works with indigenous children. I am confident that the festival experience will reverberate throughout her work and life for years to come, inspiring others to write, against the odds.

I believe that the Native Nations, Native Voices Festival is highly deserving of support. I sincerely hope that organizations and foundations concerned about language and indigenous peoples will see a way to fund this promising program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christine Eber', written over a horizontal line.

Christine Eber

Associate Professor, Anthropology