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February 19, 1978

The President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear President Carter:

A year ago I first came to the Peoples Temple, a meeting in Los Angeles. When I walked in, what I saw and what I felt were overwhelming to me. When you believe in a world of brotherhood, where no-one hoards their wealth, where everyone has dignity and an important place, where people of every race and age fellowship in joy and mutual concern, where when one is unjustly treated, it is a common cause for all... When you envision such a world, you don't ever give up hope that it will happen, however distant it sometimes seems. But the feeling I got when I walked into Jim Jones' church was something else. I felt I didn't have to wait. It was right there.

My husband, Tom Hayden and I are working hard to bring a concept of economic democracy into reality, for Californians, and for all people of this country. Jim Jones and his people are an inspiration to our efforts. I've heard much about the amazing work being done at Jonestown, Guyana, the realization of a Peoples Temple dream, and I have an open invitation to visit any time my schedule permits. I look forward to doing this enormously.

I am sorry that the reason I am writing is potentially a tragic one, but I hope you will attend to this concern with all the gravity it deserves. Jim Jones has a child, his own natural son named John, who is now living with him in Guyana. Custody of the child is being contested in the Guyanese courts, by the child's natural mother, Grace Stoen, who neglected and abandoned John; and by her husband, Timothy Stoen, who is falsely claiming paternity of the boy. There are numerous sworn affidavits to attest to the truth of this matter, plus a history of questionable and underhanded behavior on the part of both Mr. and Mrs. Stoen. Timothy Stoen's most recent venture trying to deprive this child of his (presently) happy future, has been to manipulate as many Congressmen as possible to pressure action from the State Department on his behalf, through fabrications and lies.

I want to emphasize, Mr. President, that this is no ordinary custody case. Jim Jones has got thousands upon thousands of people motivated to work for peace and social justice for good reason. Jim is someone who has taken in everyone's children: thousands of mothers, after facing the agonizing frustration of losing their youth to the street culture have seen help, hope, training, understanding, and in time, complete transformation given to case after case where everyone else thought there wasn't a chance. There wasn't any child that was too "incorrigible", there wasn't any teenager already branded as a "young criminal"

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whose life couldn't be salvaged, there wasn't any problem of rebellion or anti-social behavior that was too overwhelming to work with. Jim Jones is someone who has always loved til it hurt, who would take on the problems of complete strangers like they were members of his own family, just because he saw they were in need of help. He set up programs to put poor youth through college free, all the way through professional schools, set up free job training in every trade, counselling services, and has seen that no-one suffers for lack of proper housing, diet, or an important job to do. That's what his church is all about.

You can understand surely, the intense loyalty people feel, people many of whom came from severely deprived circumstances, towards a man who has made all this a reality for them, who has given their children a future they never even dreamed possible. It would break their faith if they saw their government intervening to ruin the chance of any future for Jim Jones' own son.

I do not feel the State Department should intervene in a foreign court matter on principle, in any case. But if they are persuaded to interfere with this case, they could only expect massive, persistent protest. And I for one, ^(could) understand why.

I know Marceline Jones too, Jim Jones' wife, I've spoken with her at length. She is a wonderful, compassionate human being, who has devoted her life to nursing work, tirelessly advocating decent hospital conditions for the elderly. She also dearly loves this child, and is in complete accord with her husband in the matter. John Jones has the best parents, and the best environment a child could ever hope to have.

I understand you told my husband Tom you enjoyed "Julia". I want to say in closing that the film "Julia" gives tremendous food for thought because you don't meet people of that commitment every day. Many people go through a whole lifetime without ever knowing what that kind of devotion is, or what motivates certain rare people to sacrifice personal comfort, wealth, all their time and energy to devote their lives to the human struggle. But that's the kind of life I believe Jim Jones leads day by day; and thousands of people who are concerned about this case agree.

Much of what America needs, to resolve its overwhelming social problems, has become embodied into the life and works of the Peoples Temple. To have someone like Jim Jones working in the Third World, to be an example of what America is capable of at her best, is something that should make America very proud. If our government takes any part in this matter at all, it should be to praise what Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple are doing in Guyana, and to encourage it to continue.

I thank you for your attention, and send regards and best wishes from my husband and myself.

Sincerely,

Jane Fonda