



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## First Lady Nez delivers message of hope at MMIW and human trafficking panel discussion



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez during the 2020 Administration for Children and Families Native American Grantee Meeting on Feb. 13, 2020, in Crystal City, VA.

**WASHINGTON** – On Thursday, Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez had the honor of providing the keynote address focused on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and human trafficking prevention, during the 2020 Administration for Children and Families Native American Grantee Meeting in Crystal City, VA.

The First Lady also served on a discussion panel that also featured U.S. Asst. Sec. of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney, U.S. Health and Human Services Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans and Deputy Asst. Sec. for Native American Affairs Jeannie Hovland, White House Senior Policy Advisor and Tribal Liaison Tyler Fish, Acting Director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, and other advocates.

In the keynote address, First Lady Nez said that it's essential to remember the children that are impacted when they lose a mother or father who has gone missing or has been murdered.

"When a young child loses their parent, it impacts the rest of their life as well as their entire family and community. The first few years of a child's life are critical to their development, and it affects the rest of their life. It's important that when a child loses a loved one, we come together as a community and as advocates to show them our love and compassion so they can have resources available to help them," said First Lady Nez.

She also spoke about her experience as an appointed member of the New Mexico MMIW Task Force, which was created by New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. Still, she acknowledged that it is the grassroots organizations and advocates who continue to play a significant role in raising awareness and for speaking for those who are not always represented at the state and federal levels.

"We have volunteers and groups who use social media and other resources to raise awareness when a person goes missing. It's because of them that we now have task forces in various states and now at the federal level with Operation Lady Justice," stated First Lady Nez.

In November, the White House announced the establishment of a Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives. The task force, co-chaired by U.S. Attorney General William Barr and Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt, is composed of federal officials charged with enhancing the criminal justice response, consulting with tribal governments on potential solutions, and empowering native communities with information.

In meetings with Senate and House members in Washington, D.C. this week, President Nez and First Lady Nez advocated for missing and murdered Diné relatives and called on Asst. Sec. Sweeney to hold a listening session with the Presidential Task Force on the Navajo Nation to hear directly from impacted members of the Navajo Nation.

On Monday, First Lady Nez and President Nez met with the Asst. Sec. for the Administration for Children and Families Lynn Johnson, Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans and Dep. Asst. Sec. for Native American Affairs Jeannie Hovland, and the Director of the Office on Trafficking in Persons Katherine Chon under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, regarding potential grant funding opportunities for community-based projects, and training and technical assistance.

Through grant funding from the Administration for Native Americans, the Nez-Lizer Administration is seeking to collaborate on community-based projects and initiatives that help Navajo families and children to help prevent and offset the impacts of social issues.

The Office on Trafficking in Persons assists communities with resources to develop anti-trafficking strategies, policies, and programs to prevent human trafficking. President Nez said that restoring hope within Navajo communities can inspire many Navajo people and families to build the

capacity in their communities to help others through initiatives that support the local economies, infrastructure projects, and more.

The Office of the President and Vice President also created an internal workgroup known as the “Diné Nihik’éeí Nihíí’ Násdłjį’: Work Group, Reunite our Diné Relatives,” led by the First Lady Nez and Second Lady Dottie Lizer, to address issues and concerns related to missing and murdered peoples and social problems impacting Navajo families. Most importantly, to heal, restore, and reunite Navajo families.

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