



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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First Lady Phefelia Nez delivers message of healing at Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Forum

SHIPROCK, N.M. – Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez delivered a message of healing at the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Forum held at the Diné College campus in Shiprock, N.M. on Thursday, where she also took part in discussions on how the Navajo Nation’s can begin to collect, track, and access information on missing and murdered cases and to develop policies to help bring Navajo relatives home.

The forum focused on discussions to understand and address the epidemic of missing and murdered Diné relatives by establishing a framework for the Navajo Nation’s first MMDR data institute.

“The Navajo Nation needs a data and research institute to address the problem of missing and murdered Navajo women, children, and relatives. Our Navajo women are the center of our society, and they offer love, comfort, and discipline. However, an alarming number of Indigenous women and girls throughout the world disappear or fall victim to murder each year at disproportionate rates compared to the rest of the population,” said First Lady Nez.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation First Lady Phefelia Nez delivers message at the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives Forum at the Diné College Shiprock Campus on June 27, 2019.

“We gather today as family members, tribal and state leaders, and concerned neighbors to shed light on cases of missing and murdered Navajo relatives, which would allow us to create a better understanding of the problem and to develop solutions,” she added.

The proposed MMDR data institute would gather, study, and research criminal and social statistics related to missing and murdered relatives, address problem areas related to criminal and social crimes, increase access to resources and funding, and assert autonomy over data collection to support Navajo Nation programs, educational institutes, and organizations.

24th Navajo Nation Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, who has been a strong voice and advocate for MMDR, stated that the primary goal of the forum is to begin looking for solutions for Navajo families who are impacted by MMDR.

“Every day, I hear the stories of the families who have experienced this devastating epidemic. The system has erased their stories, and we need to believe that this problem is happening on the Navajo Nation. We cannot ignore this topic,” said Delegate Crotty.

Speaking on behalf of the Office of the President and Vice President, First Lady Nez and former Vice President Rex Lee Jim emphasized the need to incorporate Navajo values and principles to begin the process of healing families and relatives who are impacted by the problem.

“Missing and murdered Diné relatives have received little or no attention and the lack of accurate data contributed to many problems, including the lack of prosecution and lack of coordination among local, state, and tribal law enforcement. However, this needs to change so our Navajo families can restore balance, love, and harmony,” said First Lady Nez.

First Lady Nez was recently recommended to New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s task force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, which was established to assess and determine how to increase state resources for reporting and identifying victims.

The Office of the President and Vice President also established an internal work group known as the “Diné Nihik’ée Nihí’ Násdłjį’ Work Group (Reunite our Diné Relatives),” led by First Lady Nez and Second Lady Dottie Lizer, to begin addressing issues and concerns related to missing and murdered peoples and social problems impacting Navajo families. The workgroup has tentatively scheduled a summit in August to gather with tribal, state, and federal leaders to address all related concerns.

The forum also included panel discussions with several coalitions including the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, Southwest Indigenous Women’s Coalition, and Restoring Ancestral Winds.

President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer thank the Navajo Nation Sexual Violence Prevention Working Group, 24th Navajo Nation Council, Diné College, Northern Arizona University Center for Health Equity Research, New Mexico Cabinet Secretary of Indian Affairs Lynn Trujillo, and others who contributed to this vital forum.

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