FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Navajo leaders recognize Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day in honor and remembrance of lost loved ones

PHOTO: Navajo leaders join FBI officials to recognize “Navajo Nation Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day” at Navajo Veterans Memorial Park in Window Rock, Ariz. on May 5, 2021.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, First Lady Phefelia Nez, and Second Lady Dottie Lizer were joined by the 24th Navajo Nation Council’s Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Miss Navajo Nation Shaandiin Parrish, and the Albuquerque Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Field Office at the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park in Window Rock, Ariz., for the signing of a proclamation recognizing May 5, 2021, as "Navajo Nation Missing and Murdered Indigenous
Peoples Awareness Day,” in honor and remembrance of all Indigenous people and surviving families who have lost their loved ones to murder and those who still remain missing.

“Today, we extend our appreciation to our partners and volunteers, who work hard to gather data, provide testimonies, analyze data, and provide recommendations regarding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives crisis that affects each of our lives and tribal communities. Most importantly, we come together today to support and pray for survivors and victims,” said President Nez.

During the visit, Albuquerque FBI Special Agent in Charge Raul Bujanda also met with Navajo Nation leaders to review the roles of the FBI in working with federal, tribal, and state agencies for responding to reports of missing and murdered Indigenous people.

“Setting aside a day to remember murdered and missing Native Americans is an opportunity for the FBI and our partners to reaffirm our commitment to bring justice to the victims and their loved ones,” said Special Agent in Charge Bujanda. “We also offer our condolences to the families and friends of all the victims. The FBI values its strong relationship with the Navajo Nation as we continue to work together to make our communities safer.”

“We have heard many stories and firsthand accounts of our people who have gone missing and have been murdered, and many families continue to suffer from the resulting trauma and heartache. I am hopeful that these collaborations among federal partners will lead to justice, closure, and healing for many of our people,” said Vice President Lizer.

The proclamation states that the National Crime Information Center reported in 2016 that over 5,700 Native American Women and Girls were classified as missing while at the same time the United States Department of Justice missing person database reported only 116 missing Native American Women and Girls. Overall, Native Americans face murder rates that are more than the national average murder rate.

“We understand that there are many barriers and a lack of resources to address this epidemic. For example, we recognize that tribal courts and judiciary systems are often underfunded and under-resourced, making it difficult to enforce not only tribal laws but also those at the federal level, including the Violence Against Women Act and the Tribal Law and Order Act. With increased
funding, resources, and partnerships, we will be better equipped to enforce laws and deter crimes committed against our Indigenous mothers, sisters, daughters, and LGBTQ community," said First Lady Nez.

Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty acknowledged the long history of the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples and its devastating impacts on various groups of people including veterans and transgender and LGBTQ people who are often not included in data that is gathered. She also called for more data sharing among law enforcement agencies and offered support for the establishment of a Missing Persons Unit.

"This is a crisis, our missing and murdered Diné relatives. We know there are relatives that are still out there that are not accounted for. So many times, families are out there searching and they feel isolated and they feel a sense of blame and shame, but we stand with them. Whether it’s 15 years, 30 years since a loved one has gone missing, the families still feel the loss and the pain. It’s really through working together and through communication that we begin to heal," said Delegate Crotty.

"As we face challenges during the coronavirus pandemic, we continue to pray and support efforts to heal our homes and communities. Violence continues to impact our families and communities, and we must be there for one another as a mother, father, brother, and sister. Today, let's remind ourselves to check on our families, neighbors, and all relatives. We cannot lose another relative to violence," said Second Lady Lizer.

Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety Executive Director Jesse Delmar highlighted ongoing efforts to establish a Missing Persons Unit under the Division of Public Safety that will have the personnel, funding, and resources to help find missing persons. Chief of Police Phillip Francisco offered his remarks in recognizing the continued efforts between the Navajo Division of Public Safety, Navajo Nation leadership and federal agencies to bring awareness to unsolved cases and working together to bring justice for victims and their families.

Following the ceremony, President Nez and Vice President Lizer joined Delegate Crotty and members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council outside of the Council Chamber as they gathered with families of missing and murdered relatives to offer support and to remember victims. Delegate Crotty also led an awareness walk with the families.

Navajo Nation leaders also recognize and thank U.S. President Joe Biden for declaring May 5, 2021, as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day, to increase national awareness of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Native through appropriate programs and activities. The event is available to view online on the Nez-Lizer YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBC__C_Pekw.

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