

For Immediate Release:

Contact:

Jennifer Bullock, Nevada Urban Indians, 775-788-7600
Camille Hayes, NNADV Media Liaison, camilleh@nnadv.org
Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence
Phone: 775-828-1115
Fax: 775-828-9911
Web site: <http://www.nnadv.org/>

More than One in Three Native American Women Are Raped in Their Lifetimes; Nevada Advocates Blame Lax Federal Enforcement, Racism

May 4, 2007—Native American women experience sexual and domestic violence at a rate that is 2.5 times higher than that of non-Native women, according to an April 24th report by Amnesty International. The report, titled “Maze of Injustice,” uses Department of Justice statistics to paint a sobering picture of a population in which violence against women is rampant, and federal laws are apparently complicit in creating an entrenched pattern of abuse.

The report documents the extremely high rate, “up to 86 percent,” at which Native women are assaulted by non-Native perpetrators. Amnesty concludes that this rate of interracial violence, higher than in any other ethnic group, is attributable to the difficulty of prosecuting non-Natives for crimes committed on tribal territories.

Jennifer Bullock, Executive Director of Nevada Urban Indians in Reno, said that non-Natives wishing to engage in criminal activities have historically sought out Native lands.

“There is a lot of open territory,” she said. “It’s easy for non-Indian people to filter in and not be regulated, and so a certain element has sought out tribal property for illegal activity. I stand 100% behind sovereignty, but the federal government has to provide better funding to the Bureau of Indian Affairs or these problems can’t get solved.”

Crimes committed by non-Natives on tribal lands are subject to a complex system of overlapping state, federal and tribal jurisdictions. This has created a legal vacuum in which all parties have effectively abdicated prosecutorial responsibility in domestic violence and sexual assault cases. The result is an unregulated environment in which criminals are able to rape and batter Native women with relative impunity.

Sue Meuschke of the Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence believes that this new report offers concrete evidence that institutionalized discrimination contributes to the abuse of Native women.

“When you look at this report, you can no longer doubt the role that racism plays in the violence against these women,” she said. “It’s past time for exposing the societal norms that support this culture of violence against Native women.”

The current rate of sexual and domestic assault against Native American women is unacceptable in a just society. The Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence would urge immediate action on the part of state and federal governments to quell this epidemic of violence.

About the NNADV

The Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence (NNADV) is a statewide coalition founded in 1980 to work toward the elimination of domestic and sexual violence against all persons. Our ten-person agency has its offices in Reno, but our member programs span the entire state. Affiliated agencies include: Safe Nest/TADC of Las Vegas, Committee to Aid Abused Women and A Safe Embrace of Reno, S.A.F.E. House of Henderson and Pershing County Domestic Violence Intervention of Lovelock.

Related Web Sites:

Amnesty International Report on Native Women:
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/maze/report.pdf>

North Dakota Council on Abused Women’s Services:
<http://ndcaws.org/sharedfiles/nativeamerican.asp>

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