

For Native American Women, a Triumph of Justice

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All Americans should be heartened by the recent announcement (<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2010/January/10-ag-019.html>) that the Department of Justice, under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Holder, is strengthening its commitment to fighting crimes of violence against Native American women.

As part of broader DOJ reforms to dramatically improve public safety in tribal communities, the Attorney General recognized that though there is no "quick fix," we "must continue our efforts with federal, state, and tribal partners to identify solutions to the challenges we face." After holding listening sessions with tribal leaders across the nation, he directed all 44 U.S. Attorneys' Offices with federally recognized tribes in their districts to reinvigorate efforts to combat and prosecute violent crime, particularly against women and children. And he announced an additional \$6 million to hire Assistant United States Attorneys—and additional victim specialists—to assist with the ever-growing Indian Country caseload.

After all, for Native American women, even "challenges" may be an understatement. On some reservations, violent crime is more than twenty times the national average—but women tend to suffer most. Some tribes face murder rates against Native American women of more than ten times the national average. And tribal leaders say there are countless more victims of domestic violence and sexual assault whose stories may never be told. As President Obama put it at the White House Tribal Nations Conference on November 5, "the shocking and contemptible fact that one in three Native American women will be raped in their lifetimes is an assault on our national conscience that we can no longer ignore."

The White House strongly supports efforts to strengthen the capability of law enforcement to address public safety needs on reservations, including the announced Justice Department reforms and the Tribal Law and Order Act. That's why at the Tribal Nations Conference, he commended Attorney General Holder

for his efforts to ensure greater safety in tribal communities and thanked Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Chairman Byron Dorgan and Representative Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin for their leadership on this important issue.

In his memorandum (<http://www.justice.gov/dag/dag-memo-indian-country.html>) to U.S. Attorneys, Deputy Attorney General David Ogden explained why the federal government has a responsibility to address the endemic pattern of abuse, assault, and other violence that reservations across the United States face every day. Our unique legal relationship with Native American tribes mandates it. And the 1994 Violence Against Women Act authored by Vice President Biden calls for it. But our national conscience also demands justice.

Only now, we can finally come to expect it, too.

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