



# Department of Justice

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL LORETTA E. LYNCH DELIVERS CLOSING REMARKS AT  
THE INAUGURAL NORTH AMERICAN WORKING GROUP MEETING ON  
VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS**

*Remarks as prepared for delivery*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you for your remarks and your steadfast leadership, Secretary [Sally] Jewell. It is an honor to be here with you and with so many senior leaders from Mexico and Canada – including my counterparts, Attorney General [Arely] Gómez González and Minister of Justice [Jody] Wilson-Raybould. I understand that we have had a remarkable day of discussions and I want to congratulate the delegations from Canada, Mexico and the United States on a successful launch of the North American Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls. Through this meeting, we reaffirm our shared commitment to preventing the unacceptable violence against indigenous North American women and girls. Our promise to indigenous Americans is that we will unwaveringly secure the rights and benefits to which they are all entitled. And there is much we must do to guarantee indigenous women and girls the protection and safety they deserve.

We are all familiar with the statistics: they are dire, they are shocking – and they are unacceptable. In May of 2016, the department's National Institute for Justice (NIJ) released the most thorough assessment to date of violence against Native men and women in the United States. The findings were deeply troubling: According to the study, four of five Alaska Native and American Indian women have experienced some form of violence in their lives, with more than half reporting instances of sexual violence. More than half also reported that they had been subjected to physical violence by an intimate partner. And 97 percent of the reported victims had experienced violence at the hands of at least one non-Alaskan Native or American Indian in their lifetime. These are disturbing numbers, but we must not lose sight of the fact that they represent individual lives. We owe them not just our sympathy, but our action.

I am proud to say that under this administration, we have not hesitated to act. For years, one of the glaring challenges in ending violence against Indian women was that tribes lacked the power to prosecute non-Indian assailants – even when a non-Indian man assaulted his Indian wife on Indian land. But today, thanks to the determination of leaders in both tribal and federal

government, that loophole has been closed. When President Obama signed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, it included a historic provision that reaffirmed the inherent rights of tribes to prosecute acts of domestic violence in Indian Country, even when they are perpetrated by non-Indians.

That vital provision was the direct result of the Justice Department's work with Congress and with tribal leaders and we didn't stop there. Soon after the law was signed, we established an inter-tribal working group to help tribes collectively discuss how best to exercise their new jurisdiction while upholding constitutional guarantees of due process, and how best to protect the safety and dignity of victims. By bolstering this powerful network, we are helping tribes share best practices, learn from peer experiences and take a united stand against sexual assault and domestic violence.

We have also provided tribes with the financial support to implement significant and lasting changes. In Fiscal Year 2016 alone, the Office of Violence Against Women awarded more than \$33 million in grants to tribal governments for the express purpose of improving criminal justice responses to violence against women, including by enhancing victim services and developing prevention and education initiatives. And just last month, the Department of Justice announced more than \$107 million in new grant funding for American Indian and Alaska Native communities to improve public safety, help victims and strengthen tribal institutions.

Additionally, we instructed all U.S. Attorney's Offices with Indian Country jurisdiction to enhance the prosecution of sexual assault, human trafficking and domestic violence within Indian Country and to regularly consult tribes and seek their input in crafting strategy to address Indian Country cases.

Our actions send an unmistakable message to those who commit violence in tribal communities: the federal government will use the full force of its resources to help keep indigenous girls and women safe. We will stand firmly alongside our sovereign tribal partners as they secure their ancestral lands. And we will do everything in our power to ensure that the first Americans enjoy the same inviolable rights as all Americans.

As part of this commitment, the department is taking steps to help our partners in tribal law enforcement do their jobs more effectively. Since 2010, the National Indian Country Training Initiative has educated federal prosecutors and state and tribal peace officers about the particular challenges posed by Indian country prosecutions. And in August 2015, we launched the Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information (TAP) to give tribes access to national crime information databases. The program not only provides tribes with the information they need to police their communities, but also ensures that our own efforts work in concert with those of tribes, most notably by ensuring that protection orders are enforced off-reservation. Through the TAP program, we are also providing as many tribes as possible with state-of-the-art biometric workstations, so they can add to our national databases with their own information. So far, nine tribes have been provided this technology and we plan to continue to expand access to this critical resource.

We are also investing in comprehensive and far-reaching research to inform and influence our policy-making on issues facing indigenous women and girls. NIJ has commissioned research on issues ranging from sex trafficking on tribal lands to the way that women living in tribal communities perceive law enforcement. This research will allow us to identify and illuminate the problems facing indigenous women and girls – and to ensure that government initiatives and polices are well-suited to solving these issues.

Of course, our work is far from complete. We still have a long way to go before indigenous women can live without fear of sexual assault and domestic violence. Our governments can do more together to end the scourge of human trafficking, which disproportionately preys on indigenous women. And the first women of our continent too often struggle to receive basic services, from health care to legal aid.

These are just a few of the challenges that remain before us. They are deeply rooted in a long history of broken promises and stolen dreams, and none of us has any illusions that they will be solved overnight. But I am confident that they can be solved. We are bound by a common commitment to the rights of our fellow citizens, the well-being of our neighbors and the dignity of all people. By making that shared commitment the basis of our cooperation over the last eight years, we have made progress that was unimaginable just a short time ago. And I am confident that if we remain true to our mutual obligations and our common vision, we will build on that progress in the years to come – and that together, we will draw nearer to a stronger, a safer and a more just future for all of our people.

Let me thank each of you for your exceptional commitment to that brighter future. Let me thank you for your participation in this outstanding meeting and for your ongoing efforts to support the rights of indigenous people. I look forward to deepening the vital cooperation among our nations in the weeks and months ahead. Thank you.

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