

REMARKS
OF
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ACTING ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
AT THE
NATIONAL INDIAN NATIONS CONFERENCE
AGUA CALIENTE, CA
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2012
Plenary Session, 10:00 a.m.

Thank you Sarah (Deer), and thanks to all of you who have made these opening ceremonies so meaningful and so beautiful. Before I begin, I want to also thank and acknowledge Joye Frost from our Office for Victims of Crime. Joye and her staff of dedicated professionals work all year to deliver programs, products, and events like this one that respond directly to the needs of victims and their service providers. Joye has been here for the past few days participating in the first meeting of the Attorney General's Federal Advisory Committee, The National Coordination Committee on the American Indian and Alaska Native Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Sexual Assault Response Team (AI/AN SANE-SART) Initiative, adding her expertise to this panel of advisors on the complicated legal and cultural issues faced by victims of sexual assault in Indian country.

OVC and the Tribal Law and Policy Institute selected "Strength from Within: Rebuilding Tribal Traditions to Assist Victims of Crime" as the theme for this year's conference. The

conference aims to promote traditional values and incorporate traditional skills in crime victim services, and to ensure that crime victims are treated compassionately and in a culturally-appropriate manner – and that their voices are heard.

I've had the honor of spending a large portion of my career working with victims and victim service providers. Early in my career as a prosecutor, I worked directly with victim advocates who taught me that victims need to be treated with dignity and respect throughout the criminal justice process.

More than they want a specific case outcome, victims yearn to be heard, understood, included, and remembered. These lessons were reinforced by my work under Attorney General Janet Reno during the Clinton Administration, and later when I was Executive Director of the National Center for Victims of Crime.

Since I returned to the Justice Department under Attorney General Holder, my dedication to tribal public safety and justice for tribal victims has only grown stronger. I've attended tribal consultation sessions, participated in national intertribal youth summits, chaired Tribal Justice Advisory Group meetings, and participated in the Attorney General's Tribal Nations Leadership Council meetings. I've learned first-hand about the challenges facing tribal communities and the assets they bring to confront these challenges.

We're fortunate to have an Attorney General who has made it a Department of Justice priority to increase engagement, coordination and action on public safety in Indian country, to strengthen the Justice Department's relationship with tribes and to work with tribes in a government-to-government spirit.

(And President Obama himself has made relationships with tribes an Administration priority, has met with tribal leaders, and has appointed Jody Gillette his Senior Policy Advisor on Native American Affairs. Many of you know Jodi, who is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux of North and South Dakota.)

Beginning with a Tribal Nations Listening Session in October 2009, Attorney General Holder and other Department officials met with tribal leaders to engage in a dialogue on public safety and law enforcement issues. Tribal leaders told Congress and the Administration about the pressing need for federal legislation and financial resources. Their input eventually became the basis for the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA), signed into law on July 29, 2010.

Because it was clear that TLOA required coordination among several federal departments, I established the TLOA Interagency Programs Steering Committee in 2010 to coordinate OJP's efforts in implementing the Act with those of our counterparts in other federal agencies.

This Steering Committee represents just one part of the broader Department of Justice efforts to coordinate with our federal partners in implementing the Act.

We recognize that crime rates are high in Indian country and help is not easy to come by, given tribes' geographical remoteness and scarcity of resources. But tribal victim service providers have shown time and again that their efforts to meet these challenges are unflagging.

The victim services field can learn many lessons from the way Indian nations approach justice. You teach us that healing comes, not necessarily through an adversarial process that pits one side against another, but through restoring of balance. The well-being of the victim is more important than who is right and who is wrong.

OJP – through OVC-- has been proud to support tribes and tribal victim services for almost 25 years. In 1988, after multiple-victim child sexual abuse cases were exposed on the Hopi and Navajo reservations, OVC awarded the first grants to tribes to establish Indian country victim services. In both cases, trusted school officials had exploited their access to young children and systematically sexually abused hundreds of children over several years. Those cases revealed the devastation victimization causes, both to the victims and to their communities. But out of those tragedies came a realization that we must do more to protect our most vulnerable citizens – and make sure victims get the help they need. Today, we honor those victims of yesterday through our continued – and expanded – work to serve victims today.

We have come a long way, but many challenges remain. Even while we are still confronted with familiar crimes like child abuse and sexual assault, new crimes – some of them enabled by technology – present new obstacles. We need to commit to addressing these enduring and emerging challenges.

Over the last two years, our Office for Victims of Crime – under Joye Frost's direction – has been leading a major effort to re-assess the state of the victims' field and to re-define its role in American society. It's called *Vision 21*. Our goal is simple but far-reaching: We want to re-frame the role of victim services in the 21st century, much as this conference aims to change the context in which victim services are delivered in Indian country.

This is both a daunting and an exciting prospect. Joye and her staff have met with stakeholders from across the country, including tribal representatives, to talk about what the challenges are and what we need to do, collectively, to meet the needs of victims. OVC and its partners are about to publish a report outlining a strategic vision of what the victim service field should look like going forward, and offering recommendations on how we can make that vision a reality. The report establishes that we need to make victim services part of our criminal justice

and human services infrastructure. In other words, we need to institutionalize access to rights and services.

We've also learned that we have more to do to build the capacity of victim services, particularly by enhancing our use of technology. One very promising technology-based approach is telemedicine, which makes medical experts available remotely to walk local and tribal health care providers through medical exams. OVC – in partnership with our National Institute of Justice – has recently awarded almost \$3.3 million to create the National Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Telemedicine Center. The project will provide expert medical forensic examiners to work with providers at four pilot sites to provide consultation on sexual assault forensic medical exams.

OVC is also working with Indian Health Services to provide these services to Native American sexual assault victims. The initiative will take advantage of technology to enable service providers to assist victims in hard-to-reach areas, such as remote native villages in Alaska or on reservations in the lower 48.

Finally, *Vision 21* underscores the need to develop comprehensive services that reach every segment of the victim population. We know that the needs of crime victims vary widely, depending not only on the crime, but on family and cultural background, the victim's stage of life, and the community of which the victim is a part.

As you know all too well, Native American communities still face inexcusably high crime rates and victims often don't receive the services they need and deserve. By using new technologies that bring services to victims virtually – and refocusing on the overarching theme of this conference – we can fuse the ancient and the modern and incorporate traditional values, skills, and approaches in our work to help Native American victims.

To choose one example, let me speak for a minute about our work on violence against Indian women. With input from tribal leaders, we've engaged in a concerted effort to address this issue.

For example, our Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Sexual Assault Response Team (SANE/SART) Initiative, begun in 2010, used focus groups from many tribes to identify the myriad challenges in responding to sexual assaults in Indian country. The initiative created demonstration sites, training, and evaluation criteria to help sexual assault nurse examiners and sexual assault response teams effectively provide culturally appropriate and critically important assistance to victims. In fact, one of the functions of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee that has just concluded its deliberations here is to advise us on the unique cultural issues faced by tribal victims of sexual assault.

In conclusion, I want to assure you that this Administration remains committed to addressing violent crime in Indian country, providing for safe communities, and protecting vulnerable native citizens.

To return to our theme, we must call on our strength from within, rekindle the tribal traditions. If my time working with victims taught me anything, it is that ALL victims have the power and the innate resources to overcome tragedy and adversity. But they need help. Help to find their own strengths. Help to feel safe, respected, and heard. And help to be accepted as who they are. For victims who come from cultures that are both ancient and timeless, we must create a safe environment that respects and honors those cultures.

By listening to victims' voices, honoring victims' cultures, and working together, we can, indeed, find that inner strength. In fact, I believe much of the dissonance we have experienced in the past was the result of cultural disconnects. That is why this Department of Justice is committed to hearing you, acknowledging you, and respecting you in everything we do. We fully realize that any efforts to help Native American victims must not simply impose Western ideals, but acknowledge traditional concepts of justice and methods of healing.

We have a responsibility – both a trust responsibility and a moral responsibility – to support tribes. This means giving you the resources you need to do what you do so well – comfort the aggrieved, care for the wounded, and console the grieving. Thank you.