



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2016
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV

DAG
(202) 514-2007
TTY (866) 544-5309

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL SALLY Q. YATES DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE WHITE HOUSE TRIBAL NATIONS CONFERENCE

Remarks as prepared for delivery

WASHINGTON, DC

Good afternoon, everyone and thank you for that warm welcome. Attorney General Lynch had planned to be here with you today, but she is out of town and her return was delayed, so I have the honor of being with you in her absence. I want to thank President Obama for once again hosting this important summit. It is a pleasure and a privilege to join with so many who care deeply about the relationship between the federal government and the first Americans.

We take this opportunity at the final White House Tribal Nations Conference to reflect on our remarkable accomplishments over the last eight years, to rededicate ourselves to the challenges we still face, and to reaffirm our commitment to creating a stronger and safer nation for all our people – none of which would be possible without President Obama's leadership, his vision, and his commitment to this vital issue.

Today, as a result of our shared efforts, the relationship between the federal government and the nation's 567 sovereign tribes – a relationship rooted in mutual respect and sustained by open dialogue – has never been stronger. To be sure, it is not a perfect relationship. But it is a relationship of which we can all be proud.

Attorney General Lynch and I are especially proud of the role that the Department of Justice has played in renewing and enriching ties between the tribes and the United States. Consultations are now a cornerstone of our tribal work – including the consultations with Alaska Natives that Attorney General Lynch announced earlier this year. Our Office of Tribal Justice, now a permanent fixture of the department, has worked tirelessly to respond to your concerns and advance justice in Indian Country. That is exactly what we are doing near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, where earlier this month, along with the Army and the Interior Department, we released the joint statement on the Dakota Access Pipeline that you have all seen. And we are building a consultation framework to better allow for timely and meaningful tribal input on these vital infrastructure projects.

But perhaps nothing better exemplifies our new relationship than the work we have done to resolve one of the most intractable sources of tension between tribes and the government. As you know, for decades, tribes have filed claims against the U.S. for the past mismanagement of both their funds and their natural resources held in trust by the federal government. And today, I am proud to announce that thanks to the efforts of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, the U.S. has settled the trust accounting and mismanagement claims of 90 federally recognized tribes since 2009. And we are close to settling with 11 others, for a grand total of settlements with 104 tribes amounting to \$3.3 billion. This is an important achievement that will end, honorably and fairly, decades of contention that not only sapped valuable resources, but also strained relationships.

Healing these old wounds cleared the way for new initiatives, starting with programs and partnerships designed to improve public safety. From working with tribes and Congress to pass the Tribal Law and Order Act, to cross-designating Special Assistant U.S. Attorneys to prosecute cases in both federal and tribal courts; and from training tribal prosecutors to giving tribal authorities full access to national crime databases – at every step along the way, we have sought to present a united front against crime in Indian country.

We placed particular emphasis on safeguarding Native women, who, according to one study, face a one in three chance of being raped in their lifetimes – an appalling figure that we simply cannot tolerate. That is why we directed every U.S. Attorney's Office with Indian Country jurisdiction to enhance their responses to sexual assault within Indian Country. And that is why we fought so hard to include new provisions in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 that, for the first time in decades, empowered Native women who are abused by non-Indians. This was a tremendous victory that has significantly increased the number of sexual assault prosecutions brought by both tribal and federal authorities on Indian lands. I am also pleased to announce that for the first time ever, the department's Office on Violence Against Women is awarding over \$2.1 million to seven tribes to support their work implementing tribal criminal jurisdiction over these non-Native domestic violence offenders.

We also expanded our assistance to tribes through the creation of the Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation, or CTAS, which consolidated most of the department's tribal grant programs into a single application. These vital grants support everything from hiring law enforcement officers to empowering native youth, giving tribes the resources they need to meet the particular challenges facing their communities. And today, it is my privilege to announce that in fiscal year 2016, we are making 236 awards under the solicitation, for a total of more than \$102 million dollars. With this announcement, we will have awarded more than \$726 million in CTAS grants during the Obama Administration.

We could not be prouder of all that we have accomplished over the last eight years. Everything that we have done together has been founded on a simple premise: that we are nations who share a common land, and citizens who share a common country. On that basis, we have made strides together to build a strong relationship between the federal government and sovereign tribal nations – a relationship that we have built to last, no matter the turn of the electoral wheel. This relationship has been woven into the fabric of the Department of Justice

through the principles we have declared and the initiatives we have fostered. This relationship – this sacred partnership – is one of this administration’s proudest legacies. It is a testament to what we have done. But more importantly, it is a foundation for what we will do. And because of the friendship and partnership that we have forged together – the friendship and partnership that I see as I look around this room – I am not just hopeful, but certain, that although this administration is drawing to an end, our work together to build a stronger, a safer, and a more just society for every American is only just beginning.

Let me thank each of you for your commitment to and your investment in that work over the last eight years. Thank you for being a trusted partner and a valued ally to the Department of Justice. I look forward to all that we will achieve – together – in the days to come. Thank you.

###

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE USE THE CONTACTS IN THE MESSAGE OR CALL THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AT 202-514-2007.