

Navajo Nation President Nez speaks at Indian Country safety summit

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. - Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Police Chief Phillip Francisco, and Council Delegate Eugenia Charles Newton, attended the inaugural 2019 Indian Country Public Safety Summit Aug. 27, to garner support for the Navajo Nation's public safety initiatives and to increase partnership opportunities with the federal government in support of tribal communities.

The two-day summit, hosted by the U.S. Department of the Interior, focused on identifying and coordinating public safety resources for tribes and provided a forum to discuss public safety priorities with tribal leaders, law enforcement officers, and judicial officials.

"As leaders of the Navajo Nation, we are working together to leverage our Nation's sovereignty to identify resources that have now led to a gradual increase in the number of police officers on the Navajo Nation under the leadership and vision of Police Chief Francisco, the development of a work group to focus on missing and murdered Diné relatives issues, and other ongoing initiatives," Nez stated.

"Today, the Office of the President and Vice President and the Law and Order Committee with the leadership of Chairwoman Eugenia Charles Newton, Division of Public Safety Executive Director Jesse Delmar, Chief of Police Phillip Francisco, and our men and women in uniform have been doing a great job with the limited resources we have," he added.

The President also highlighted the Nation's progress in designing and constructing new justice centers in Shiprock and Window Rock to replace the current dilapidated facilities, and the Nation's success in securing funds through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to help combat the "modern day monsters" such as alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, depression, and other issues that affect Navajo people.

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Nez emphasized the importance of incorporating cultural and traditional teachings into public safety measures, behavioral and mental health services, and prevention efforts.

“T’áá hwó’ ajít’éego, or self-reliance and self-determination, is what we as leaders are trying to re-instill in our people, especially our youth. It’s a teaching that we can incorporate into many aspects of what we’re trying to accomplish in terms of improving public safety in our communities,” he added.

“Our administration is also developing a Diné Action Plan that we can apply to many issues and further incorporate our teachings - we will be presenting this to the Council in the near future.”

In speaking about partnerships he noted that in the state of Arizona, the Navajo Nation Office of the Prosecutor is coordinating with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to place a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Office of the Prosecutor, who would be a Navajo prosecutor with special designation to assist in the prosecution of federal offenses committed on the Navajo Nation.

Nez thanks the U.S. Department of the Interior and many other tribal leaders and advocates for the opportunity to have a dialogue and work together to address public safety for Indian Country and the Navajo Nation.