

Human trafficking awareness walk

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 04 February 2022 05:39



WINDOW ROCK, ARIZ.—Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council marched from the Navajo Nation Museum along Highway 264 and Indian Route 12 to the Council Chambers for the 2022 Winter Session, Jan. 24.

The walk was organized to bring awareness to National Human Trafficking Prevention Month and to memorialize the lives of the Missing and Murdered Diné Relatives across the Navajo Nation.

Around 30 people joined Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Madam Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton, Council Delegate Charlaine Tso, and Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown, for the two-mile march from the Navajo Nation Museum to the Council Chambers. A press conference was held with various guest speakers before the start of the 2022 Winter Session.

“Many of our relatives, especially our Navajo women, have gone missing from our communities, in local border towns, and the cities,” Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’ahnáoozt’í’í, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhí/Tó Kóí), said. “It is an ongoing problem that has caused much trauma for our families.

“The loss is unbearable when our relatives disappear and are never found,” she continued. “Our

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women are powerful beings, and their stories need to be told.

“This walk allows us to talk about human trafficking, women trapped in man camps, and the violence that comes with it,” Crotty said. “We need to break the silence of the victims and uplift the voices of our survivors.

“Families cannot heal until justice is fully served as we bring an end to human trafficking,” Crotty concluded.

Today, the Navajo Nation defines human trafficking as the illegal recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person, especially one from another country, with the intent to hold the person captive or exploit the person for labor, services, or body parts. Human trafficking offenses include forced prostitution, sweat-shop labor, slavery, forced marriages, and harvesting organs from unwilling donors.

“In 2017, Honorable Nathaniel Brown sponsored the Navajo law against human trafficking that was unanimously passed amending the tribal code,” Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Łichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), told the gathering. “Since this time, the Navajo Nation has advocated for our missing and murdered Diné relatives by creating a task force to increase resources for reporting and identifying cases, and to work with Navajo law enforcement to identify any barriers.

“Trafficking violence must end, and survivors should be supported through their healing journey,” Damon said. “It is my belief that we must hold federal and state agencies accountable for the crimes perpetrated by non-Natives on and off the Navajo Nation.

“For our families to heal from such trauma, we must do everything we can to search, locate, and bring home our missing relatives,” Damon said.

According to research conducted by the National Congress of American Indians, most individuals of trafficking are victims of child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, substance abuse, are runaways, homeless, or live in extreme poverty. Most sex traffickers often target

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vulnerable populations subject to social discrimination such as the Indigenous lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S+) community.

“The last several years, I have had the honor of serving on the Arizona Human Trafficking Council appointed by the governor,” Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii’tó), said. “Human trafficking is a real-life issue that affects us deeply as Navajo people.

“Passing laws against trafficking has allowed us to gather more data and to educate Navajo law enforcement on how to recognize it, he continued. “In the Navajo language, there is no word for human trafficking.

“Our communities are trying to understand what it is, so we must continue to have conversations about how global problems impact us at home on the Navajo Nation,” Brown said. “It is through our prayers to the Holy People that will provide healing for our families and give survivors strength.”

The United States Justice Department shared that Indigenous women are murdered at a rate 10 times higher than the national average, while more than 4 out of 5 Indigenous women have experienced violence.

“It has been almost eight months since Ella Mae Begay went missing,” Council Delegate Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Tólikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa), told the group. “She is a beloved grandmother, mother, sister, and aunty whose life matters.

“We will continue to fight for her family and those she loves, Tso said. “Our missing Indigenous relatives need to be found and those who were victims of murder deserve full justice under federal law.

“The Navajo people have felt the trauma of our own going missing and not knowing if your loved one is safe deeply hurts,” she said. “The search for all our missing matriarchs will never end.”

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Last year, the National Crime Information Center reported nearly 5,300 records were filed for missing Indigenous women, a large majority of that number was made up of children and teenagers.

Madam Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), is working to amend Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code so a comprehensive Victims Rights Bill is added immediately. Working with Council Delegate Crotty, legislation will be introduced this spring session to ensure victims are protected and have more rights under Navajo law.

“Our Indigenous people have experienced the trafficking of our women, children, and those most vulnerable since our encounter with non-Navajos,” Charles-Newton said. “Our relatives were taken during the Navajo Long Walk, and we have seen this through the history of other Tribal Nations across the country.

“Our people need to know that human trafficking is happening in our communities and it affects both men and women, young children, and our LGBTQ+ relatives.”

Since 2017, the federal government has increased funding for tribal prevention programs, expanded efforts to identify victims, hosted human trafficking trainings, and provided more access to national crime information for tribes to help address sex trafficking, the opioid crisis, and other social issues impacting Indian Country.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline can be contacted at (888) 373-7888 or by text message to 233733 (Text “HELP” or “INFO”). The hotline is open 24 hours, 7 days a week. Further information can be accessed at www.humantraffickinghotline.org

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