



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker



CITY OF
ALBUQUERQUE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Nation and City of Albuquerque Sign Historic Human Rights Memorandum of Understanding

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Aug. 11, 2019 – The Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker, Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission and the City of Albuquerque Office of the Mayor executed a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday, Aug. 9, 2019 between the two governments to address discrimination and racial equality among all members of the Albuquerque community.



PHOTO: Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Leonard Gorman, Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Denetdale, City of Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller, Speaker of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Seth Damon and Navajo Nation Council Delegate Daniel E. Tso at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding addressing coordination between the two governments on issues of racial and community relations on Aug. 9, 2019.

The 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon and Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Denetdale signed the memorandum on behalf of the Navajo Nation and Mayor Tim Keller signed on behalf of the City of Albuquerque Human Rights Board and the Office of Civil Rights.

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“This is a shared moment of strength between the Navajo Nation and the City of Albuquerque. This Memorandum of Understanding is a significant stepping stone in furthering mutual respect and equality among the many people of the City of Albuquerque,” said Speaker Damon.

“This agreement to address discrimination against citizens of the Navajo Nation and people of color is long overdue. Together, we will improve outreach efforts, provide joint training sessions and share information and outcomes of investigations that impact us both. We are committed to working together as intergovernmental partners on important issues like public safety and homelessness,” said Mayor Keller.

“We’re embarking upon a good relationship intended to address many of these different concerns,” said Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Executive Director Leonard Gorman.

The memorandum calls on both governments to develop joint initiatives that bridge gaps between people of different races and cultural backgrounds through outreach, education and information sharing.

The preamble of the memorandum states: “The civil, political, social, cultural and economic history between the United States, Navajos and other indigenous peoples is significant, complex and tragic. As a result of that history, indigenous peoples as well as other minorities have needlessly suffered from discrimination.”

The call for bettering racial and community relations in the City of Albuquerque was amplified in 2014 after Allison Gorman and Kee Thompson, both members of the Navajo Nation, were beaten to death by three non-Navajo teenagers. The teenagers assaulted the two homeless men with a wooden table leg, tree branches and a cinder block. They left the men and later returned with knives and stabbed both Gorman and Thompson, leaving them nearly unrecognizable.

Another violent murder occurred in the city in 2018 when two teens shot Ronnie Ross six times. Ross was also a member of the Navajo Nation and was homeless at the time of his death.

Both the City of Albuquerque and the Navajo Nation responded with efforts to address root causes for racial disparities among Navajo people and minorities in border town communities. The City of Albuquerque restarted the Commission on American Indian and Alaska Native Affairs and created the Office of Civil Rights and the Human Rights Board. The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission held public hearings to help identify specific issues Navajo people face in the city and pushed for the development of a government-to-government agreement.

“We thank the mayor for endorsing this memorandum of understanding and the acknowledgement that even the homeless people need to be taken care of. They are our brothers, our sisters, our relatives,” said Navajo Nation Council Delegate Daniel E. Tso.

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“We are really pleased that we are in a place where we can begin to talk on a government to government level between the Navajo Nation and the City of Albuquerque. We are looking forward to a fruitful relationship,” said Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Denetdale.

“As we strive to make Albuquerque more inclusive, urban Native Americans and our sovereign neighbors are critical partners,” said Mayor Tim Keller.

The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission was created in 2006 by the Navajo Nation Council within the Legislative Branch. As an entity of the Navajo Nation government, the commission collects and distributes information regarding issues of discrimination against Navajo people. The commission is charged with interfacing with local, state and federal government entities. The Speaker appoints five commissioners which are then confirmed by the Naabik’íyáti’ Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Denetdale, City of Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller and Speaker of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Seth Damon sign a Memorandum of Understanding on racial and community relations issues on Aug. 9, 2019.

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