



Navajo Nation observes National Slavery and Human Trafficking Awareness Month

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council acknowledged January as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month in observance of the Navajo Nation's continued fight against the growing human trafficking epidemic. On Dec. 31, 2020, the White House issued a proclamation making January 2021 the first observation of National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

“Many people think human trafficking only happens across the ocean. It is here and it can happen in any community no matter what age, race or gender,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii'tó). “We have a long way to go in changing our Navajo Nation Code to bring justice to our children and we need to step-up or our future generations will suffer.”

According to the US Department of Homeland Security, human trafficking involves the “use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.” Traffickers might use violence, manipulation or false promises of jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into trafficking situations.

On Oct. 27, 2020 the Navajo Nation received a presidential award for extraordinary efforts in combatting human trafficking that was accepted by Brown on behalf of the Council.

Brown, a member of the Arizona Human Trafficking Council (HTC), also indicated the coronavirus (Covid-19) has intensified human trafficking activities with a 40 percent increase in emergency calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

The 23rd Navajo Nation Council approved Resolution No. CJY-48-17, amending Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code to criminalize human trafficking activities. CJY-48-17 was unanimously approved and included provisions to strengthen Navajo Nation jurisdiction over non-Navajos who commit acts of human trafficking, coercion or kidnapping against a Navajo person.

The HTC has been gathering data on such cases and is working with local government officials to actively rescue individuals from human trafficking situations and to bring awareness to related poverty and inequality issues.

Brown said human trafficking is often connected to addiction to drugs, alcohol and sex. Other risk factors include poverty and the geographic isolation of many communities located far from healthcare and law enforcement services.

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) community are particularly susceptible and targeted for their race in large cities, like Phoenix, said Brown.

The Navajo Nation Division of Social services and the Navajo Epidemiology Center indicated that up to 3 percent of Navajo deaths are attributed to suicide and 51 percent of cases involving missing Navajo girls go unreported.

“These statistics are hard to fathom and ones you wish you did not hear. Child victims of human trafficking have no childhoods, no weekends to look forward to and no holidays, and that is something everyone should be fighting daily to change,” said Brown.

Under a 1976 US Supreme Court ruling, non-Navajos were protected from prosecution by Navajo authorities on the Navajo Nation, which also resulted in less severe penalties for kidnapping and other forms of violence against Navajo citizens.

In response, the Nation began emphasizing the effort to combat human trafficking. This includes supporting the recently-enacted Savanna’s Act and the Not Invisible Act. Both are aimed at protecting Native Americans, especially Native women and those of the LGBTQI community.

“Many times, we see family members assuming girls are acting out, visiting friends or that they will be coming back. True numbers are hard to approximate with the added challenge of safely collecting this information during the Covid-19 pandemic,” said Brown. “Our children are feeling shame for things that are not their fault and it halts their healing.”

In addition to providing advocacy for local, state and federal policy changes, the Navajo Nation Council encourages victims or those who know of a human trafficking situation to use these resources for help:

The National Human Trafficking Hotline connects victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking with services and support to get help and stay safe. The hotline also receives tips about potential situations of sex and labor trafficking and facilitates reporting that information to the appropriate authorities in certain cases. Toll-free phone and SMS text lines and live online chat function are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days. To contact the hotline, call (888) 373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to BeFree or 233733. Deaf or hard of hearing or speech-impaired people can contact the hotline by dialing 711.

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) helps people who have been in forced prostitution, forced labor, and slave-like conditions by providing legal and social services. To request services or report tips regarding potential human trafficking cases, contact the toll-free, 24/7 hotline at (888) Key-2-FREE or (888) 539-2373.

Journey Out provides services and support to help victims of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. For assistance call (818) 988-4970 or email info@journeyout.org.

“One way we can help is by having these difficult conversations with our family, children and elders. We need to heal ourselves and our families’ trauma. Navajo lawmakers, state legislators and the federal government continue to work together to change laws and policy. That includes creating legislation to protect our people from human trafficking and providing community education at the local level,” added Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’áłnáoozt’íí, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhi/Tó Ko’í).

During the 2021 winter regular session, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council and Legislative Branch employees wore blue to remember victims of human trafficking. Red will be worn Thursday to remember missing and murdered Diné relatives.

“The epidemic of human trafficking has been a whole-Nation issue. We all hurt when any one of our children are hurt, and we must all work together to change that,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

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