



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council hosts Human Trafficking Awareness Walk during 2022 Winter Session

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PHOTO: Council Delegates Eugenia Charles-Newton, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, and Nathaniel Brown lead walkers from the Navajo Nation Museum to the Council Chambers in Window Rock, Ariz. to bring awareness to human trafficking.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council hosted a ‘Human Trafficking Awareness Walk’ to bring awareness to the growing problem of human trafficking and the search for missing or murdered Diné people across the United States.

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. 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. Our 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. 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,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’atnáoozt’í’í, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhi/Tó Ko’í).

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. 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. 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. We applaud the leadership of Honorable Amber Kanazbah Crotty for always being an outspoken advocate for our women, children, elders, and the LGBTQ+ community,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhááí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Łichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh)

According to research conducted by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), 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 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. 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. 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. It is through our prayers to the Holy People that will provide healing for our families and give survivors strength,” added Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii’tó).

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. Most concerning is an average of 40 percent of women involved in sex trafficking identified as Native American from the United States or Canada. This growing epidemic must end so victims are reunited with their families.

“It has been almost eight months since Ella Mae Begay went missing. She is a beloved grandmother, mother, sister, and aunty whose life matters. We will continue to fight for her family and those she loves. 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. The search for all our missing matriarchs will never end,” said Council Delegate Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Tółikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa).

Last year, the National Crime Information Center reported nearly 5,300 records were filed for missing Indigenous women, a large majority of that number 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. She added, “Our Indigenous people have experienced the trafficking of our women, children, and those most vulnerable since our encounter with non-Navajos. 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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