



## NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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### **Flagstaff Mayor signs MOU with Navajo Nation Speaker & NNHRC Chairperson to address and improve race relations**

SAINT MICHAELS, Ariz.—Navajo Nation Speaker Johnny Naize and Flagstaff Mayor Sara Presler signed a memorandum of understanding to address and improve race relations between Navajos and non-Navajos on March 27, 2012 as an effort put forward by the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission. NNHRC Chairperson Duane H. Yazzie signed the MOU earlier that day prior to the signing ceremony in Flagstaff, Ariz.

According to the MOU, “Together the COMMISSION and the CITY intend to move forward acknowledging and respecting our mutual histories, and in order to build up on the past and improve the future; this UNDERSTANDING is entered into with a spirit of Hózhóogo.”

The MOU also states under the general provisions, “It is understood that the CITY and COMMISSION may decide to refrain from the addressing issues that are outside the scope of this UNDERSTANDING.” And, continues with, “The COMMISSION is established to address not only race relations, but other human rights issues, *inter alia*, the right to practice cultural beliefs; and ... .”

The MOU also states that the city or NNHRC may terminate the understanding and only the signatories of the MOU may make amendments.

As for Flagstaff, Mayor Presler was the first mayor from an Arizona community to sign the MOU with the Navajo Nation.



Seated in the middle of the picture are 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council Speaker Johnny Naize and Flagstaff Mayor Sara Presler, both signed the MOU on March 27, 2012. NNHRC Chairperson Duane H. Yazzie (not pictured) had signed the Flagstaff MOU earlier on March 27<sup>th</sup>.

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For NNHRC, Flagstaff is the sixth community adjacent to the Navajo Nation to sign on to improving race relations between Navajos and non-Navajos.

Other Mayors that have signed a similar MOU with the same goal to improve race relations include:

- Grants Mayor Joe Murrietta of New Mexico signed on April 29, 2010
- Gallup Mayor Harry Mendoza of New Mexico signed on August 12, 2010
- Farmington Mayor Tommy Roberts of New Mexico signed on Nov. 17, 2010.
- Cortez Mayor Dan Porter of Colorado signed on May 24, 2011.
- Bloomfield Mayor Scott Eckstein of New Mexico signed on August 22, 2011.
- Flagstaff Mayor Sara Presler of Arizona signed on March 27, 2012.

To arrive at this juncture, NNHRC had conducted 25 public hearings in border towns of the Navajo Nation and received over 175 testimonials from Navajos and non-Navajos about race relations in 2008 and 2009. Following the public hearings, NNHRC produced a report, the 2008-2009 Assessing Race Relations Between Navajos and Non-Navajos: A Review of Border Town Race Relations, and provided recommendations to address improving race relations. Memorandum of Agreements was one recommendation. The report was released on August 22, 2010. For NNHRCs public hearing in Flagstaff about race relations on December 3, 2009, NNHRC received 15 public testimonials.

Following the recommendations in the report, NNHRC sent border town city officials a draft memorandum to address race relations and improve race relations in the fall of 2009, including Flagstaff.

#### **What is the MOU process?**

Typically, once a city is engaged to initiate the MOU process, the process entails negotiations between NNHRC and city staff members who seek their counsel's expert opinion to determine the language unique to the particular city. The language is then considered by the city's legislative council and if approved the MOU is returned to NNHRC for its Commissioners to approve. The MOU then is directed to NNHRCs governing body, the Naab'ik'iyati' Committee of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council to approve. A signing ceremony finally takes place at a press conference with the intent to openly address race relations—improving race relations within the City government for its citizens. The next step is to address the respective testimonials in the Assessing Race Relations report.

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**Flagstaff City Council**

For citizens of Flagstaff, the Flagstaff City Council approved the MOU, 6-0, in favor, on February 2, 2012, to improve race relations between Navajos and non-Navajos in the City of Flagstaff.

**NNHRC & Navajo Nation Council's Committee**

On March 2, 2012, NNHRC Commissioners approved the MOU, 2-0, in favor. The MOU was then considered by NNHRCs oversight committee, the Naab'ik'iyati' Committee of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council on March 14, 2012. The MOU was approved, 21-0, in favor and the MOU legislation was sponsored by Hon. Joshua Lavar Butler (To Nanees Dizi).

For more information about NNHRC's 2008 - 2009 Assessing Race Relations report, go to [www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov) and click the link for the report.

*The memorandum of understanding is the new language proposed by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council since its government reform from 88 council delegates to 24 council delegates, when Title II of the Navajo Nation was amended and adopted. Prior to this, the language for such an understanding was known as memorandum of agreements.*

*NNHRC advocates for the recognition of Navajo human rights and addresses discriminatory actions against the citizens of the Navajo Nation. For more information, call the NNHRC office at (928) 871-7436 or visit the NNHRC website at [www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov](http://www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov).*

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