



OFFICE OF NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Navajo Nation and City of Albuquerque to Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Race Relations, Treatment of Navajo Citizens

St. MICHAELS, Ariz. – Speaker of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Seth Damon (Bááhááí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) and Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission Chair Dr. Jennifer Denetdale, PhD., will join Albuquerque, N.M. Mayor Tim Keller to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) between the Navajo Nation and City of Albuquerque on August 9, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. at the Mayor’s Office Suite, 1 Civic Plaza, 11th Floor of City Hall in Albuquerque.

The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (“Commission”), Albuquerque Human Rights Board, and City of Albuquerque's Office of Civil Rights began developing the MOU between the city and nation after the 2018 death of a Navajo homeless man in the city.

The MOU was developed for the purposes of strengthening communication and coordinating services between both entities. Additionally, it will help the Commission in addressing issues of racism and hate crimes.

In 2014, Allison Gorman and Kee Thompson, two Navajo homeless men, were beat to death in the city by three non-Native American teenagers. The three teenagers used makeshift weapons they found, including a table leg, a cinder block and tree branches, to pummel Gorman and Thompson, who were resting in an empty West Central lot. After the assault, the teenagers retrieved kitchen knives and returned to stab Gorman and Thompson. All the teenagers were sentenced in 2017.

Unfortunately, this was not the end of the abuse and death of Navajo homeless men in the city. In 2018, Ronnie Ross, a 50-year-old from Shiprock, NM was shot a dozen times, including once in the forehead and temple, and four times in the back, by two non-Native American teenagers. The teenagers were charged with murder and said that they shot Ross “for fun” as they came and went from a hotel party nearby.

“On behalf of the nation, I welcome this collaboration between the city and the nation,” stated Speaker Damon. “I know that the hard work of Dr. Denetdale, the Commission, the city’s Human Rights Board and Office of Civil Rights is a strong starting point for improving the relationship between Navajos and the city. It is critical for all peoples to feel safe in the largest city in the state.”

For the Commission, this will be the ninth MOU focusing on bettering race relations between border towns and the Navajo Nation. “The MOUs have been a good vehicle for the Commission and border towns in addressing Navajo citizens’ safety and treatment concerns. It is fundamentally important that communication be the cornerstone of this relationship to address these issues,” stated Leonard Gorman, Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission. Since 2010, the Commission has implemented eight MOUs with the following governments:

1. Grants, Mayor Joe Murrietta of New Mexico signed on April 29, 2010.
2. Gallup, Mayor Harry Mendoza of New Mexico signed on August 12, 2010.
3. Farmington, Mayor Tommy Roberts of New Mexico signed on Nov. 17, 2010.
4. Cortez, Mayor Dan Porter of Colorado signed on May 24, 2011.
5. Bloomfield, Mayor Scott Eckstein of New Mexico signed on August 22, 2011.
6. Flagstaff, Mayor Sara Presler of Arizona signed on March 27, 2012.
7. United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division – Indian Working Group signed on July 12, 2013.
8. Winslow, Mayor Robin Boyd signed on November 1, 2013.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation, the Commission is pleased to sign the MOU with the City of Albuquerque. We have advocated for Diné citizens who reside in cities like Albuquerque and for Diné who must travel to towns and cities for goods and services, and are sometimes meet with racial hatred and discrimination,” said Dr. Denetdale. “By signing the MOU with the city, the Commission looks forward to strengthening the Navajo Nation’s relationship with the city. Diné who come into places like Albuquerque, which is on indigenous lands, should feel safe and welcomed.”

For more information on the MOU or signing ceremony, please contact the Commission at 928-871-7136.

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