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## **NAVAJO NATION WASHINGTON OFFICE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **First Lady Vikki Shirley Testifies Before United Nations Committee on Issue of Violence Against Native Women**

GENEVA, Switzerland—Navajo Nation First Lady Vikki Shirley testified last week before the United Nations Committee to Eradicate Racial Discrimination (CERD), bringing world attention to violence against women in Native America.

“Women are held in a place of honor in our Native cultures,” said First Lady Vikki Shirley before the independent group of internationally recognized human rights experts known as CERD. “But current United States law has severely limited the ability of tribal authorities to protect Native women, while failing to provide adequate federal law enforcement services.”

The Committee oversees compliance to a United Nations treaty on the elimination of racial discrimination that was originally ratified by the United States in 1994. The treaty requires countries to review policies that may create or perpetuate racial discrimination. The committee questions signatories to the treaty every four years. The committee questioned the United States delegation during the week long human rights panel that ended Friday, February 22.

First Lady Shirley’s testimony focused mostly on the issue of violence against Native women. “When a Native woman turns to the United States government to investigate and prosecute her batterer or rapist, help is often too slow to respond or denied outright. On the Navajo Nation there are 319 officers patrolling 26,000 square miles,” said First Lady Shirley, emphasizing the need for a more rapid response to crimes perpetrated against women.

“The United States must make public safety on Native Nations a priority and fully implement the Violence Against Women Act. First Lady Shirley, speaking on U.S. legislative efforts in fighting violence, said, “One in three Native women will be raped and six in 10 will be assaulted in their lifetime.”

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In 2006, the Navajo Area Indian Health Service reported approximately 850 women as seeking services for emotional or physical abuse. Across Indian Country the Department of Justice reported that up to 70% of sexual assaults are never reported. Of those that are reported few see criminal prosecution.

“Current United States law limits tribal governments from protecting their women. We seek adequate support from the United States to prosecute and incarcerate offenders who are not prosecuted by the federal government,” continued First Lady Shirley.

A recent report found that the US Attorneys fail to prosecute over two-thirds of the crimes that originate in Indian Country. “We ask for your help in addressing this disparate system of justice” concluded Ms. Shirley.

Navajo Nation Washington Office Legislative Associate Clara Pratte, assigned to human rights issues, set up meetings at the United Nations, created recommendation questions to the special panel, and analyzed the U.S. response.

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