Seeding Sovereignty
Indigenous Folx Creating Radical Change

President Donald Trump

May 5th, 2020

Re: Five Asks for May 5th - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Awareness Day

Dear President Trump,

On November 26, 2019, you released an Executive Order to establish “Operation Lady Justice – an interagency task force charged with developing an aggressive, government-wide strategy to address the crisis of missing and murdered women and girls in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.” This order was released just six months after you proclaimed May 5, 2019, as Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Awareness Day.

We acknowledge these gestures, however, considering other actions during the run of your presidency, many in Indian Country wonder if they are sincere. To truly understand MMIWGT2S is to know that many of the policies that your administration has pushed forth are exacerbating this crisis. It is not enough to assign a task force, “to review Indian Country cold cases, strengthen law enforcement protocols, and work with tribes to improve investigations, information sharing and a more seamless response to missing persons investigations.” (Operation Lady Justice) The work must go deeper; it must go past reactionary solutions and to the underlying cause of this 500-year genocide. Ending this crisis means the US government must recognize and stop the predatory effects of colonial-capitalism, the violence of institutionalized white supremacy, and the oppressive dominance of the heteropatriarchy. Your administration has blatantly taken a supportive stance on all of these outlooks and has violated many human rights and Tribal sovereignty. We, therefore, ask that today, on the day you have proclaimed, Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Awareness Day, that you do the following 5 things:

1) Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and pass other legislation relevant to the safety of Indigenous Peoples such as Savanna’s Act and Not Invisible Act.

- It has been over a year and VAWA is still not reauthorized. For Indigenous people, VAWA has provided much needed federal funding for countless programs across Indian Country and, since 2013, it has become a historic piece of legislation because it recognizes criminal jurisdiction and sentencing authority.
by tribes over non-Indians due to the high percentage of Indigenous womxn being assaulted by non-Indian men. It also provides increased protections for LGBTQIA+/Two-Spirits Folks and immigrant women. It is vital that you insert language into Operation Lady Justice that recognizes these populations as, within Indigenous communities, they face very high rates of undocumented violence. Furthermore, the definition of domestic violence heeded by the Office on Violence Against Women needs to be reinstated to the robust version it was before you took office and reduced it to one sentence.

2) Expedite Substantial COVID-19 Funds and Resources to Tribal Nations.

- Pandemics increase gender-based violence and Indigenous womxn face the highest rates in the country. While lockdowns are escalating domestic abuse all over the world, gun sales are surging across the US. All of this is happening while VAWA remains unauthorized largely due to the NRA lobbying against increased gun prohibitions for domestic abusers in updated VAWA bills proposed in the house and senate. Gun violence has a “disproportionate impact on Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic women. In addition, segments of the LGBTQ community and people with disabilities are highly vulnerable to severe forms of relationship abuse, but there is alarmingly little data...” (Everytown) Shelter-in-place order and increased gun sales have created a “perfect storm” of possible unprecedented violence to Indigenous womxn, children, LGBTQIA/2S communities and Brown and Black folx. Tribal Nations need COVID-19 relief for more than medical reasons—we need it to increase protection during a time when the rates of MMIWGT2S are in danger of escalation.

3) Denounce the Hyde Amendment and abortion bans and support the fact that abortions are essential services during COVID-19.

- Legislators, in states such as Texas, deem abortions non-essential during shelter-in-place orders, which could not be further from the truth. Indigenous women face the highest rape and sexual assault rates in the United States, according to the Indian Law Resource Center. Cycles of trauma have also heightened the rates of substance use in our communities. These injustices alone create a higher need for abortions as these are crisis situations where a women’s right to choose is an absolute necessity. But poverty, inadequate education, and reproductive health discrimination created by a lack of quality family planning resources in areas with high Indigenous populations also lead to high unintended pregnancy rates. In 2017, it was reported that youth pregnancies were more than twice as high in indigenous teens than in white teens. Not only do Indigenous women have a greater need to access family planning and abortion services but the Hyde amendment has limited all access to this essential health care need on reservations since 1976.

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4) Honor the treaties and recognize Indigenous land sovereignty.

- Your natural resource extraction development plan to offer loans to the tanking oil industry affects the safety of Indigenous womxn. The same is true with opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Permian Basin to fossil fuel extraction, greenlighting pipelines like DAPL, KXL and Line 3, allowing mining at sacred sites like Bears Ears National Park and taking lands out of trust, which has devastated the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. With large development projects like construction, mining, or fossil fuel extraction comes one of the most violent threats to Indigenous communities, which is the creation of man-camps in close proximity. As James Anaya, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has stated, “Indigenous women have reported that the influx of workers into Indigenous communities as a result of extractive projects also led to increased incidents of sexual harassment and violence, including rape and assault.” The relentless colonization of our territories has a direct correlation to an increased rate of violence against Indigenous Peoples—in particular womxn, children and LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit folx. It is no longer a “word of mouth” issue as many organizations and academics, and even the Canadian government, have recently delved into researching man-camps in Indigenous territories and have reported disturbing stories and statistics.

5) Increase resources to prevent skyrocketing suicide rates in Indian Country, including awareness campaigns, prevention measures, youth programs, mental health accessibility, and survivors’ funds.

- Suicide Rates for Indigenous Peoples in the US have risen significantly since 1999. This rate surpasses all other groups in the country by far with an increase of 139% for Indigenous women and 71% for Indigenous men. We have faced genocide and colonization for centuries and have only begun to legally gain the same rights and safeties as settler society. However, legal safety does not erase institutionalized white supremacy, daily racial and gendered oppression, nor the ongoing historical trauma in our communities. These are also factors in the MMIWGT2S crisis and why suicide should be counted in the statistics. Our relatives are not committing suicide in a vacuum—they are doing it for all the same reasons that they go missing or are murdered.

Ay hai kitatamihin, Mvto, Iheední

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