

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), May 2013**

**Agenda Item 3 on Indigenous Youth**

**May 20, 2013**

**U.S. Statement**

**Delivered by Terri Robl, Minister Counselor**

Thank you Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates and Forum participants, the United States appreciates very much the opportunity to address this forum and to highlight actions taken in 2012 and 2013 in favor of indigenous peoples and their communities, which also benefit indigenous youth.

At the 2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference, high-level U.S. consultations with indigenous tribal leaders that were started in 2009, President Obama addressed attendees and Cabinet Secretaries participated in breakout sessions with conference participants. The breakout sessions allowed for frank discussion on areas that indigenous peoples identified as important, including economic development, housing, energy, law enforcement, disaster relief, education, and strengthening the government-to-government relationship. We invite you to review the report released in connection with the conference, entitled “Continuing the Progress in Tribal Communities”, for details about U.S. government policies and actions in favor of indigenous peoples and indigenous youth in the United States. I will highlight just a few initiatives here.

First, in the area of education, the U.S. Government supports science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in tribal colleges and universities, as well as the preservation of Native languages in schools while advancing proficiency in English. For health, U.S. government-funded community

health centers provide services to hundreds of thousands of American Indians and Alaskan Natives. We fund numerous substance abuse and mental health programs, including some devoted to suicide prevention. On improving living conditions in communities, the President's fiscal year 2013 budget request includes \$650 million for the Indian Housing Block Grant. The Safe Indian Communities Initiative aims to support the prevention of violent crime in tribal communities. And in favor of environmental and cultural preservation, we support programs to introduce Native American students to career opportunities in the field of conservation.

The Obama Administration has worked to resolve longstanding Native American legal trust claims against the United States and private entities related to land, water, natural resources, and other issues. Between January and November 2012, the Administration settled the trust accounting and management claims of 59 individual tribes. Since taking office in 2009, the Obama Administration has processed successfully over 1,100 tribal applications for taking lands into trust on behalf of tribes. The tribal lands in the United States have grown by more than 200,000 acres in this timeframe.

In July 2012, President Obama signed the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act (HEARTH Act) into law. Under the HEARTH Act, tribal governments have the ability to enact regulations to govern the leasing of tribal lands, which enhances tribal control over these lands. The Act also reduces the time it takes to get a lease of tribal lands approved, thereby promoting economic development of Indian lands.

We are now past the two-year anniversary of the 2010 Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA), which has steadily improved the federal government's ability to work with Indian tribes in investigating and prosecuting crimes affecting indigenous

communities. The TLOA gives tribes greater sentencing authority; strengthens defendants' rights; helps at-risk youth; establishes new guidelines and training for officers handling domestic violence and sex crimes; improves services to victims; helps combat alcohol and drug abuse; expands recruitment and retention of Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal officers; and gives officers better access to criminal databases.

The U.S. Congress passed a third extension of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in February 2013, and President Obama signed the extension into law on March 7. This latest reauthorization contains an important new provision that allows indigenous tribes to prosecute non-Native perpetrators of violence against indigenous women for acts that occur on tribal lands. This is particularly important, given that indigenous women in the United States, including adolescent girls, face disproportionately high rates of domestic violence. The Act also continues effective programs and expands the protections and services available to survivors of violence.

Also, the Departments of the Interior, Energy, Agriculture, and Defense have recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on Sacred Sites, and developed an Implementation Plan to continue to work toward appropriate access to, and protection of, these significant places.

Finally, in 2012 the Department of the Interior's National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Service worked with the State of Montana and the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes to successfully return genetically pure bison to their historic rangelands on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

Thank you for your kind attention.