



U.S. Department of Justice
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PRESS RELEASE

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NAVAJO MAN FACES FEDERAL MURDER CHARGE

ALBUQUERQUE – Earlier today in Albuquerque federal court, a U.S. Magistrate Judge found that there was probable cause to support a criminal complaint charging **Jasper Fernandez**, 37, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, with murder. The Magistrate Judge also ordered Fernandez detained pending trial.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Fernandez is charged with killing Vernita Ann Jose, a 36-year-old Navajo woman, on November 4, 2011. Fernandez allegedly committed the offense in a rural area due south of Farmington, N.M., that is within the boundaries of the Navajo Indian Reservation.

According to the criminal complaint, law enforcement officers initiated the investigation of this case on December 16, 2011, after receiving a report that a human skull had been found at a residence located near the Huarfeno Chapter House, which is south of Bloomfield, N.M. The reporting party told the officers that dogs brought the skull to her residence, and led the officers to an area where she discovered a partially buried body after following the dogs.

According to the criminal complaint, the San Juan County Sheriff's Office was asked to assist in the investigation because it had been investigating a missing person report regarding Ms. Jose. Because Ms. Jose had not been seen since November 4, 2011, her family had reported her missing. When Ms. Jose's body was exhumed on December 17, 2011, officers recovered personal possessions belonging to Ms. Jose, including a Bible with her name

inside. Subsequently, on January 4, 2012, the Office of the Medical Examiner positively identified the body as Ms. Jose's remains.

During the investigation, officers identified Fernandez as an individual who had an intimate relation with Ms. Jose, and confirmed that he had been with her on the night of November 4, 2011. Fernandez was arrested on February 22, 2012, after making statements to the officers that implicated him in the murder of Ms. Jose.

If convicted of the murder offense charged in the criminal complaint, Fernandez faces a maximum prison sentence of life imprisonment.

The case was investigated by the FBI with assistance from the San Juan County Sheriff's Office and the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety, Shiprock Division, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul H. Spiers.

Charges in criminal complaints are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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