

REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL DAVID W. OGDEN AT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH EVENT

Washington, D.C.

Thank you, Tom. I had the privilege of working with the Associate Attorney General on many issues in the Clinton Administration, and it's a pleasure to be working with him again on issues like this one that matter so much to both of us.

Mr. Attorney General, thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. And to the dedicated Department of Justice employees in the Office of Violence Against Women, the U.S. Attorney's Offices, the FBI, ATF, and here in Main Justice who work day in and day out to enforce the Violence Against Women Act – thank you for your service, which is making a real difference in the lives of women and families across the United States.

And, finally, thanks also to all of you outside the Department who have done so much to bring attention to the problem of intimate partner violence. Your work has made a real difference.

I want to echo the Attorney General's call to break the cycle of violence that destroys so many lives, families and communities. There's no doubt that we've seen significant improvements. The landmark Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was made possible through the tireless commitment of so many in this room. Since its enactment, VAWA has provided new support for survivors of domestic violence and reduced the intolerable number of Americans who are killed by an intimate partner.

But domestic violence continues to have a severe impact on our society, and we have much work left to do. So many women, men and children in our country – of every background, ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation – are damaged by this devastating crime.

I also want to focus on a particular aspect of the problem: Violence against women and children in tribal communities. Given the federal government's trust responsibility and its unique authority to prosecute serious crime on tribal lands, this is a unique federal responsibility. The levels of violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women are shocking, and cannot be tolerated. Indeed, in some tribal land counties, murder rates for American Indian and Alaska Native women are 10 times the national average. As in many communities, poverty and lack of educational opportunities may both contribute to the scope of the problem and make it especially hard for victims to escape abuse.

In Indian country, as in the rest of the United States, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provides important tools. VAWA grants often provide the sole source of funding for on-reservation domestic violence shelters and for victim advocates in tribal communities and, in some cases, a domestic violence investigator and prosecutor. OVW-funded grants have reached approximately 325 Tribal Nations, and support 23 tribal domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions in 17 states.

As I mentioned, the Department of Justice has a unique responsibility to pursue justice against those who commit domestic violence in tribal communities, because in many instances, only the federal government has the legal authority to do so. As part of our commitment to these communities, we have commenced a Department-wide initiative and redoubled our efforts to improve public safety in tribal communities.

Later this month, the Associate and I will join the Attorney General to meet with tribal leaders to discuss the pressing public safety challenges facing tribal communities, including the urgent concern of violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women. I believe this will be the first time the top three officials of the Department together engage with tribal leaders on these issues.

To end violence against women and children in every community in America requires sustained focus and commitment from the Justice Department as a whole. Domestic violence is devastating not only for the immediate victims, but takes an enormous toll on each survivor's family, friends, co-workers, and community. So while we recognize the important work and successes in this effort today and throughout this month, the Department will also work tirelessly every day and every month to finally end domestic violence. It is a privilege to join with you in this effort.

Thank you.