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**Indigenous Women's Movements to End Violence
Against American Indian, Alaska Native, and Aboriginal Women**

Press Statement of Tamra Truett Jerue

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Alaska Native women are subjected to the highest rate of forcible sexual assault in the United States; one in two experience sexual or physical violence in her lifetime.¹ Alaska Natives comprise only 15.2% of the population in Alaska, yet they represent nearly 50% of the domestic violence victims and 61% of the sexual assault victims.² The painful truth of the matter is that, although Alaska Native women have the same human rights as all other people, our women are protected less and denied access to meaningful remedies just because they are indigenous and are being assaulted in Alaska Native villages.

These extreme rates of violence against Alaska Native women are tied to a discriminatory legal system that has limited the authority of Alaska tribes to protect indigenous women and girls from violence. Though some important reforms have taken place in the United States in recent years, among the worst barriers remaining are those impacting Alaska Native nations and women. All but one of the 229 tribes in Alaska are prevented from taking advantage of these improvements in the law available to nearly all other tribes in America simply because of the way the United States classifies our land. We are being subjected to the highest rates of violence, yet U.S. law treats us differently than other women, including other indigenous women.

Urgent, overarching concerns raised by Alaska tribes include the lack of law enforcement and extreme dangerousness in villages, lack of victim services and shelter, and lack of recognition of tribal court orders of protection. There is a consistent pattern of inadequate law enforcement response, including the lack of a comprehensive infrastructure to address safety and accountability for domestic and sexual violence in Alaska's villages. The State of Alaska has failed in its responsibility to provide adequate law enforcement and judicial services to Alaska Natives in rural Alaska. Too often the life of a woman depends largely on the local community's ability to provide immediate protection and assistance to her.

The only way to ensure that rural Alaska Native women and their children can enjoy the basic human right to safety and to be protected against all forms of violence is to develop a local response to the serious problems they face. Currently, villages without local law enforcement must rely solely on Alaska State Troopers who may be hours or even days away, making timely law enforcement response often impossible. We believe that the lack of an adequate and timely response to the epidemic levels of violence against Alaska Native women and children is an additional rights violation and falls short of the United States' human rights obligations and its commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to consider the issue of the empowerment of indigenous women at its next session in 2017 and to include the participation of indigenous women and governments in these discussions.

The Alaska Native Women's Resource Center was organized in 2015 to build capacity at the village level to combat violence against women and to better coordinate our work with the efforts of our indigenous sisters in the rest of the United States and around the world. AKNWRC's philosophy is that violence against women is rooted in the colonization of indigenous nations. We believe that ending violence against indigenous women will require a comprehensive, human rights based approach to the issue that takes into account both our human rights as indigenous women and our indigenous rights of self-government and self-determination.

¹ S. 1474, the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act of 2013, § 2(a)(3), (4).

² UAA Justice Center Report to the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (May 13, 2010). According to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's Epidemiology Center, 1 in 2 Alaska Native women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence.