



**First Nations Womens Alliance**  
*Supporting and Healing the Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault*

## **Prevent Sex Trafficking Collaboration, Transformation, Impact**

President Biden has declared January 2023, **National Human Trafficking Prevention Month**. His proclamation included recent legislative changes impacting Indian Country:

“Through reauthorization of VAWA, we have created a new unit within the BIA that can help investigate human trafficking as an underlying cause of missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.” Hopefully, this unit will help increase our knowledge about important interconnections between trafficking and both sexual assault and MMIP.

This new unit is a continuation of work begun with the 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act which created the federal Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP) within the State Department. For over 20 years that Office has issued an annual report on TIP which includes monitoring of international trafficking. Trafficking is legally defined as a “crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services or to engage in commercial sex acts.”

Several other resources can help enhance our understanding of and responses to this crime:

The **National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888)** provides referral services and other resources and has identified calls by state since 2007. For example, there were 100 “signals” (calls, texts, chats and tips) from North Dakota in 2021. Most contacts related to sex trafficking and cases were primarily hotel based.

**The ND Human Trafficking Task Force** served 99 victims in 2020, 56 adults and 13 children, and investigated 93 cases, identifying 13 victims.

The federal Office for Victims of Crime is celebrating 20 years of anti-trafficking work by producing a **“20 Year Anti-Trafficking Commemoration Guide,”** which includes outreach materials, artwork, videos, web banners and other resources.

Another document was produced by the **Human Trafficking Leadership Academy Class 5 Cohort**, which considered the question “How can culture serve as a protective factor in preventing trafficking of Native Youth?” The document includes an overview of the impact of historical trauma and colonization, risk factors specific to Native Americans, and prevention strategies, and provides recommendations for action in addition to suggesting how culture can, in fact, be a protective factor. FNWA’s former Education and Training Coordinator, Ashley Roulette, was a member of the Class 5 Cohort.

Finally, The Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC) and others are sponsoring a major conference on trafficking January 24-26 in New Orleans. **“Strengthening a Sovereign Response to Sex Trafficking in Indian Country”** will take a comprehensive look at all aspects of trafficking as well as providing advocacy tools for community engagement. Registration is now open. MIWSAC has also published a manual for responders titled **Sex Trafficking in Indian Country** and the landmark report **Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota.**

The exploitation of human beings for labor and sexual gratification is a very old scourge. Each story is a personal tragedy and a shameful reflection of our most cruel, dehumanizing impulses as a society. Naming it and supporting those who are actively working to prevent further abuses is a start.

Thank you for not turning away.

January 2023