Since its beginning in 2020, we have watched Operation Lady Justice and associated federal initiatives to address the genocide now known as the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and people (MMIWG & MMIP) continuously inflict harm on MMIWG & MMIP families and show disrespect to the movement to have their voices heard. As grassroots advocates, many of whom are also impacted family members, we feel that now is the time for us to speak against the trauma Operation Lady Justice has caused, and the insensitivity and colonial power dynamic it continues to show.

Opportunities for families and grassroots advocates to meaningfully participate have been shockingly minimal. Families and grassroots advocates had no opportunity to take part in the design of the initiative as a whole, much less specific items such as listening session structure, outreach plans, or project leadership. No member of OLJ’s team has publicly identified as a MMIWG or MMIP family member, and it entirely overlooks and excludes community members who have been frontline leaders in this movement for years. For these reasons, we have seen the following forms of disrespect to the movement and failure to honor impacted families take place:

+ No significant outreach was done to invite impacted families and grassroots advocates to participate or testify in OLJ listening sessions--solely utilizing government websites and professional listservs is not enough when the majority of the people with expertise on this issue are grassroots.

+ The number of listening sessions has been inadequate, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were slated to take place in select locations in person only, with impacted families and grassroots advocates expected to cover their own travel expenses to participate, even when the nearest listening session was taking place over a 12 hours’ drive away.

+ Listening sessions have largely been inaccessible due to a needlessly complicated virtual system. In order to testify, one must have both a stable internet connection using the virtual meeting platform and also simultaneous strong cell phone reception; due to structural inequities such as lack of services and poverty, many tribal communities do not have this level of connectivity, and many Indigenous people lack at-home wireless access and a device other than a smartphone.
Testimony in public listening sessions was limited to three and a half minutes, and available only on a first come, first served basis. Forcing families and their advocates to compete for a chance to be heard—and requiring them to summarize their story of grief, loss, and system bias and failure to respond in three and a half minutes—is unethical, insensitive, and counterproductive to the goal of learning about how this violence impacts Indigenous communities and how we can most effectively remedy the system failures to prevent and address it.

The only session explicitly for grassroots advocates to testify has been scheduled for May 7, 2021. Sovereign Bodies Institute (SBI) directly communicated with Marcia Good, Executive Director of the Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives, on why we felt that was not an appropriate date. Namely, SBI said that due to the national day of awareness on MMIWG occurring on a week day this year (May 5), many families and organizers would be holding events through the following days and weekend. Moreover, we expressed concern that many families who participated in May 5 activities will be emotionally drained and not at their best to provide public testimony in the stressful conditions OLJ has created in their listening sessions. SBI received a response from Ms. Good, stating that the May 7 date was in honor of May 5. SBI responded with more detail about the above-mentioned concerns, and suggested that a compromise would be to hold another session on a later date, and to give an option to provide written and/or recorded testimony. SBI also stated that if OLJ Task Force members really wanted to learn from grassroots advocates in honor of May 5, they would attend grassroots events and meet with advocates to determine a listening session model that was trauma-informed. Ms. Good did not respond.

The federal cold case review teams created by OLJ, announced in December of 2019, have failed to make a meaningful or noticeable impact on this crisis. A full year after being announced, these teams still had no phone lines or points of contact available to MMIWG & MMIP families as of December 2020 (personal contact via email with OLJ Executive Director Marcia Good). It is unclear if this is still the case, as no grassroots advocates or the families they work with have had contact with one of these teams.

The MMIP Coordinator program created by former AG Barr in November 2019 has also failed families and grassroots advocates. Due to a lack of appropriate oversight and accountability, and the exclusion of families and advocates from leadership in the program, it has become easy for MMIP Coordinators to fail in their duty to support MMIP efforts throughout their respective states. One notable example of this is MMIP Coordinator Ernie Weyand (assigned to Montana)—Mr. Weyand has refused to respond to communications from families and their advocates for over a year, including emails, phone calls, public letters, pleas in media coverage, and marches and rallies. Indeed, we were deeply upset to learn that Mr. Weyand was curating, editing, and writing special publications on best practices to address MMIP even while he completely ignored the families and advocates begging for his attention in his own jurisdiction.
As impacted families and advocates in the US, we are grateful for the continued opportunity to learn from our relatives to the north, who have been organizing on this issue throughout Canada for over thirty years. We watched the Canadian National Inquiry repeatedly disrespect, traumatize, exclude, and trigger MMIWG families and their advocates for years, and have learned from their pain and struggles that federal initiatives must be led by families and their advocates, and must be trauma informed. Operation Lady Justice is neither.

Moreover, we were encouraged to see that the national dialogue around the Canadian National Inquiry affirmed what we have long known— that the MMIWG & MMIP crisis is, in fact, an ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples. We cannot move forward to address this violence in an effective manner while the United States continues to avoid or deny the fact that this mass death of Indigenous peoples is an ongoing genocide. It is unethical, immoral, and ineffective to allow a violent, oppressive government with a role in ongoing genocide to simultaneously deny that a genocide is occurring while also taking credit for leading tokenizing, hollow efforts to ‘save’ Indigenous peoples from the deaths they themselves are complicit in.

As MMIWG & MMIP families and advocates working directly with families with our boots on the ground and our hearts in the fight for justice, we know that we deserve to be heard. We are the true experts on the violence we and our loved ones experience, and this violence will not end until we are empowered to take leadership in protecting our peoples and implementing justice.

More than a seat at a colonial table, we have the right to create our own circles from which to design solutions, and we have a right to implement those solutions as sovereign, self-determining peoples. We denounce the practices and structure of Operation Lady Justice and other affiliated federal initiatives as rooted in colonial systems of power, abusive to families and their communities, and antithetical to the mission of creating a world free from violence for Indigenous peoples.

**SIGNED,**

**ARIZONA:**

Annitia Lucchesi (Cheyenne)
Executive Director, Sovereign Bodies Institute
SBI Survivor Leadership Council

Valaura Imus-Nahsonhoya (Hopi Tribe)
Missing Persons & Trafficking Recovery
Founder/Executive Director, Honwungsi Consulting Services, LLC
CALIFORNIA:

Raechel Ibarra (Chiricahua Apache)
SBI Survivor Leadership Council

Michaela Madrid (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe)
Operations Manager, Sovereign Bodies Institute

Cari Herthel (Esselen Tribe)
SBI Survivor Leadership Council

Mona M. Sespe
Member Pala Band of Indians

Jordan Marie BringsThreeWhiteHorses Daniel (Kul Wičasa Oyaté / Lower Brule Sioux Tribe)
Executive Director, Rising Hearts

Josey Tenorio Lomahquahu Tewa (Hopi--Snow Clan and Sun Clan)
MMINWM Advocate Activist

Christina Marie Lastra, M.A.Ed.
Spanish Teacher
Civil Rights Activist
Creator of Buenlucha Parent & Student Advocacy Humboldt Co.

MINNESOTA:

Jessica Gidagaakoons Smith (Bois Forte Band of Minnesota Chippewa)
SBI Survivor Leadership Council

Marisa Cummings (Umonhon/Omaha)
President/CEO, Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center

MONTANA:

Blossom L. Old Bull (Lower Brule Sioux)
Mother of Braven Glenn, suspicious death
Warrior Women for Justice

Tasheena Duran (Chippewa Cree)
MMIP Family Member, Advocate, & Grassroots Organizer

Desi Small-Rodriguez (Northern Cheyenne)
Board Member, Sovereign Bodies Institute
UCLA Assistant Professor
oklahoma:
Grassroots Advocates

new york:
less specific items such as listening session structure, outreach plans, or project leadership. No member of OLJ's Families and grassroots advocates had no opportunity to take part in the design of the initiative as a whole, much more for us to speak against the trauma Operation Lady Justice has caused, and the insensitivity and colonial power structures that operate.

Since its beginning in 2020, we have watched Operation Lady Justice and associated federal initiatives to address the genocide now known as the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and people (MMIW & MMIP) continuously inflict harm on MMIWG & MMIP families and show disrespect to the movement to have their voices heard. As grassroots advocates, many of whom are also impacted family members, we feel that now is the time for us to speak against the trauma Operation Lady Justice has caused, and the insensitivity and colonial power structures that operate.

MMIWG2S Family member advocate

Crystal Cavalier (Occoneechi Band of Saponi)
Founder, MMIW North Carolina

Amanda R. Young, M.A (MHA Nation & Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa)
4th year Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Student

Sutton King (Menominee & Oneida Nations of Wisconsin)
President, Urban Indigenous Collective

Cheyenne Antonio (Diné)
Community Organizer

Ariel Richer (Descendent of Indigenous people of Venezuelan and Trinidad and Tobago)
Co-founder, CEO Urban Indigenous Collective

Agnes Woodward (Plains Cree)
MMIWG2S Family member advocate

OKLAHOMA:

Carmen Thompson Harvie
President, Murdered and Missing Indigenous People Central Chapter of Oklahoma

Halana Jay
President, MMIP Apache Chapter of Oklahoma

Gen Hadley
President, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women of Oklahoma-Southwest Chapter (MMIW-OK-SWC)

TENNESSEE:

Jodi Voice Yellowfish (Mvskoke, Lakota, Cherokee)
Chair, MMIW Texas - Rematriate

WASHINGTON:

Roxanne White (Nimiipuu, Yakama, Nooksack, & Aaniih)
MMIP Family Member, Survivor, National Advocate, & Grassroots Organizer

Cissy Strong Reyes (Umatilla)
MMIP Family Advocate and Grassroots Organizer
Grassroots Advocates

Public Statement on Operation Oklahoma:

community members who have been frontline leaders in this movement for years. For these reasons, we have seen the team has publicly identified as a MMIWG or MMIP family member, and it entirely overlooks and excludes the voices of the people directly affected by Operation Lady Justice.

Since its beginning in 2020, we have watched Operation Lady Justice and associated federal initiatives to address the crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. These initiatives have been abusive to families and their communities, and antithetical to the mission of creating a world free from violence for Indigenous peoples.

We cannot move forward to address this violence in an effective manner while the United States continues to avoid accountability for the violence it has long-known to be occurring. Since its beginning in 2020, we have watched Operation Lady Justice and associated federal initiatives to address the crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. These initiatives have been abusive to families and their communities, and antithetical to the mission of creating a world free from violence for Indigenous peoples.

We are the true experts on the violence we and our loved ones experience, and this violence will not end until we are empowered to take leadership in protecting our communities.

We will continue to post and send updated versions of this statement to the SBI website and relevant federal agencies.

IF YOU IDENTIFY AS A MMIWG & MMIP GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER OR FAMILY AND WOULD LIKE TO SIGN THIS STATEMENT, PLEASE EMAIL SOVEREIGN BODIES INSTITUTE AT MMIWDATABASE@SOVEREIGN-BODIES.ORG.

WASHINGTON (CONT.):

Carolyn DeFord (Puyallup)
Daughter of Leona Kinsey
Founder and Advocate at Missing and Murdered Native Americans

Trishandra Pickup (Suquamish Tribe)
WCPA member & Human Rights Activist

WASHINGTON DC:

Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee Nation)
Partner, Pipestem and Nagle Law

WISCONSIN:

Rachel Fernandez (Menominee)
Grassroots Organizer & Advocate, Woodland Women

Executive Director, Rising Hearts
Jordan Marie BringsThreeWhiteHorses Daniel (Kul Wičasa Oyaté / Lower Brule Sioux Tribe)
SBI Survivor Leadership Council

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WE WILL CONTINUE TO POST AND SEND UPDATED VERSIONS OF THIS STATEMENT TO THE SBI WEBSITE AND RELEVANT FEDERAL AGENCIES.
Trisha Etringer (HoChunk/Meskwaki)
Director of Operations, Great Plains Action Society

Kristin Welch (Menominee)
Founder & Executive Director, Waking Women Healing Institute

AutonomousAbq
Autonomous organizers, frontliners, and affinity groups

Dara L. Jefferson (Northern Arapaho/Meskwaki)
MMIP Family Member and Advocate

Melodie A. Lopez (Hopi, Navajo, Pueblo, Mexican)
President, Indigenous Strategies LLC
Co-founder, HONOR Collective - Healing Our Nations, Offering Resiliency

Dawn Wilcox B.S.N, R.N.
Founder & Executive Director, Women Count USA: Femicide Accountability Project

Serina Fast Horse (Sicangu Lakota & Blackfeet)
Program Coordinator, Institute for Tribal Government - Portland State University

Jessica Rojas (Chicana)
Executive Director, Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods

Sandra L. Dunkin (Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians)
Peshawbestown, Michigan

Christy Swimmer McLemore
Vice President - MMIWTX-REMATRIATE

Carol Hopper (Northern Arapaho)
MMIP of Northern Oklahoma

Melanie Moniz (MHA Nation)
Survivor, Activist, Grassroots Organizer

Catherine Stoothoff

Hannah P. Schmidt (Anishinaabe)
Activist and Community Organizer

Viridiana Preciado
SBI Research Coordinator