



**NEWS RELEASE
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**Community-Based, Environmental and Civil Rights Activists Across Country
Issue Statement and Unified Demands**

Santa Fe, NM – July 9, 2020 - The New Mexico Environmental Law Center (the Law Center) stands in solidarity with a broad alliance of environmental justice groups, activists, allies, and partners from across the country. This week, the Law Center released a call to action highlighting that disparities experienced by people of color during the COVID-19 crisis reflect environmental racism and a long history of discrimination and segregation.

The statement shows how the confluence of crises in the US has exposed the sacrifice zones to which we relegate communities of color, immigrants, indigenous people and other marginalized groups, and includes specific steps the country must take to begin to rectify the legacy of harm from racist policies and institutions.

“COVID-19’s harsh impact on Native Americans, Latinx and African-Americans has exposed the racist environmental laws and policies in this country that have concentrated pollution in communities of color and low income communities, leading to a public health and civil rights crisis that has been exacerbated by the deadly virus. Now is our opportunity to restructure our civil rights and environmental laws to prevent corporations from contaminating the communities, lands and water where people of color live,” said Eric Jantz, Interim Executive Director, New Mexico Environmental Law Center.

As the country confronts systemic racial inequality, the alliance is speaking out during this unprecedented time to affirm the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement, condemn the epidemic of police killings of people of color, and call for an end to the disproportionate death of people of color resulting from environmental racism.

“Native people have shown our resilience for centuries. Just as we have used resilient strategies to address the lack of clean water, access to health care, educational inequality, the digital divide, and abandoned uranium piles poisoning our land, we must use resilient strategies to address COVID-19. Until the United States government upholds its treaty obligations to Native people, where we ceded our lands for the right to housing, healthcare, and education, we will rely on our courage, wisdom and resilience to survive this latest threat, just as we have survived all the

previous threats to our existence,” said Dr. Gayle Dine Chacon, Former Surgeon General of the Navajo Nation.

Signed by over 60 groups and individuals who have worked for years on issues of environmental justice, civil rights, and the environment at local, state and national levels, the call to action highlights how the legacy of systemic discrimination contributes to the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on communities of color. It calls for eight steps forward to dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality. These include equal protection under the law to address inequalities in housing and environmental exposures, an end to discriminatory segregation, access to clean water, and stronger enforcement of environmental laws, among others.

“The All Pueblo Council of Governors continues to advocate for the federal government, our Trustees, to address our urgent needs during this National Health Emergency. The federal government has treaty obligations to protect the health and safety of Pueblo people – obligations that have never been fulfilled, leading to the heavy impact of COVID-19 in some of our Pueblo Nations. Our relationship with the federal government is not based on race but rather based upon our status as political sovereign governments engaged in a government to government relationship, established in the US Constitution, supreme court decisions, treaties, statutes and federal Indian law,” said J. Michael Chavarria, Governor, Santa Clara Pueblo, Chairman of All Pueblo Council of Governors.

The call to action was drafted by the Title VI Alliance, which works to ensure that environmental and land use policies are at the forefront of progress toward justice as the nation confronts a legacy of racial discrimination and grapples with reforms ranging from policing to health care. The Title VI Alliance was formed more than a decade ago as a space to regularly convene local, state, and national advocates and activists across the country to exchange advice, strategize, and draft state and national legislation to advance equal protection under the law. Many activists, individuals, and other groups across the country signed onto the statement in solidarity.

[VIEW THE STATEMENT](#)

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About New Mexico Environmental Law Center

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center has been defending environmental justice since 1987. It is our mission to work with New Mexico’s communities to protect their air, land and water in the fight for environmental justice. nmelc.org