Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Assistant Secretary Ross Swimmer today emphasized there will be no action by the federal government next month to forcibly remove Navajo families from land belonging to the Hopi Indian Tribe in Arizona.

"There will be no federal action to evict the Navajos remaining on the Hopi partitioned lands on July 6," Swimmer, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, said. “Apparently, some people are unaware that Congress has recognized that we cannot meet a July 6 deadline for completing relocation in the Navajo-Hopi settlement. Yet we continue receiving calls from the media and from individuals who mistakenly believe there will be a confrontation on the issue next month."

Legislation enacted in 1974 to settle a land dispute between the Hopi and Navajo tribes required the relocation of many Indians. In 1981, a deadline of July 6, 1986, was set for completion of the relocation, but Congress last December recognized that it would take longer to complete the resettlement of Navajo families still remaining on Hopi partitioned lands.

"Congress has told us that none of the Navajo families now living on lands partitioned to the Hopi Tribe can be relocated until such time as replacement housing has been provided for them," Swimmer noted. "And Congress al located about $22 million for the BIA to construct housing for Navajos yet to be relocated."

Swimmer said the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is working closely with the Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation Commission under an agreement put into effect on February 25, 1986, to complete the relocation. The Commission was created by Congress as the primary agency for relocation.

"The BIA policy is to pool our expertise with that of the Commission to complete the job," Swimmer said. "We are not attempting to replace the Commission. We have a partnership in the commitment to see that the Navajo families are provided appropriate housing, useful counseling and other assistance necessary for an improved lifestyle in their new locations."

Congress specified that the BIA construct houses on what is known as "new lands" -- some 250,000 acres of land given the Navajo Tribe by the federal government and 150,000 acres of land purchased by the Tribe.

The Commission continues to have responsibility to construct relocation housing for those Navajos who choose to relocate on the previously existing Navajo Reservation lands or at an off-reservation site.

Swimmer, who visited the area where most Navajos awaiting relocation are residing said he believes that nearly all of them will agree to move when they are assured that appropriate housing and grazing lands will be available.