Media Contact: Carl Shaw, (202) 343-2315
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Interior's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Eddie F. Brown is enlisting Indian tribal leaders and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) employees as part of an intensive program to combat the sexual abuse of Indian children.

Brown has assigned his deputy for operations, Walt Mills, as overall coordinator of BIA's child protection programs to ensure that prompt and effective action is taken on all existing elements of the program of preventing, identifying potential abusers, reporting procedures when abuse is suspected, enforcement, and follow-up psychological care to victims of reported incidents.

"We want the message to go out: **child sexual abuse will not be tolerated**," Brown said. "We have identified five areas to strengthen our child protection activities, and 12 specific actions in those areas are underway. Walt Mills will be coordinating all these activities and reporting to me on the steps I have asked him to take."

In his letter to tribal leaders, Brown said Indian and non-Indian communities alike must develop strong safeguards for the protection of children. He said the effects of child sexual abuse on the victim can be long lasting and tragic and that BIA's education initiatives will be greatly diminished if children first must deal with the enormous physical and mental trauma such abuse causes.

Brown outlined these steps already taken by the BIA to strengthen child protection activities as

(1) Establishment of a rigorous screening process for new employees working with children;

(2) Updating of personnel manual regulations for obligatory reporting of suspected abuse, including administrative sanctions for failure to report incidents;

(3) Formation of a BIA/Indian Health Service national oversight committee to enhance inter-agency cooperation and review child protection team effectiveness;

(4) Organization of· additional child protection teams at area and agency levels to ensure prompt actions when abuse is suspected; and

(5) Training of BIA personnel in child abuse recognition, reporting and remedial action processes, In addition to specifying additional actions to be taken by the BIA, Brown requested tribal government suggestions for strengthening the program. "Successful coordination of our efforts requires working closely with the tribal governments," Brown said.

In his letter to BIA's 14,300 employees, Brown said he expected all employees to take advantage of training that is offered to enhance their ability to discern potential incidents of child sexual abuse. "In addition," he wrote, "I expect every employee to report such potential incidents to the appropriate enforcement and social services agencies immediately."

Brown has asked Mills to provide him by December 15 a schedule with specific timeframes for

completion of the actions. He also asked him to coordinate overlapping issues with the Indian Health Service.