

PRESS RELEASE: NCUIH Commends Supreme Court Decision as Monumental Victory for Indian Country

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McGirt v. Oklahoma reasserts the US treaty with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC (July 9, 2020) - On July 9, 2020, in a historic decision the US Supreme Court sided with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, a case set to decide the jurisdictional fate for the eastern part of Oklahoma. In a 5-4 decision, the court acknowledged the treaties which the US government has continually broken. "On the far end of the Trail of Tears was a promise. Forced to leave their ancestral lands in Georgia and Alabama, the Creek Nation received assurances that their new lands in the West would be secure forever...Because Congress has not said otherwise, we hold the government to its word" (*McGirt v. Oklahoma*). This marks a major victory for Indian Country, as the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's treaties with the US government are upheld.

"Tribal sovereignty is a top priority for the National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH). We know all too well that the promises made to American Indians and Alaska Natives are often broken. Today's decision is truly a win for all of Indian Country. We commend the court for its decision today and congratulate the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in its victory. We also urge the federal government to do more to rectify longstanding injustices against Indian Country. As allies, we at NCUIH will continue to do all we can to advocate for the sovereignty of all Indian Nations. Today, sovereignty has won," said Francys Crevier, Executive Director of NCUIH.

"As a Muscogee (Creek) citizen, this decision is more than the court upholding the United States government's legal obligation as written in treaty, it is the highest court in the land acknowledging that my great-great grandmother's lands are still ours. No court can define the meaning of our lands, but thankfully, this decision conveys to the world what we have long known to be true," said Julia Wakeford (Mvskoke), Policy Assistant at NCUIH.

These lands were guaranteed through direct relations with the US Federal government and the Tribe, a relationship which has been undermined by the state of Oklahoma. In the official opinion offered by Justice Neil Gorsuch, it was made clear that only through direct legislative means can this reservation be disestablished. In *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, the federal government followed through on its treaty obligations, with the court disavowing many actions taken against tribes in this country: "Unlawful acts, performed long enough and with sufficient vigor, are never enough to amend the law. To hold otherwise would be to elevate the most brazen and longstanding injustices over the law, both rewarding wrong and failing those in the right. The judgment of the Court of Criminal Appeals of Oklahoma is Reversed." (*McGirt v. Oklahoma*)

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The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) is the national non-profit organization devoted to the support and development of quality, accessible, and culturally-competent health and public health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) living in urban areas. NCUIH is the only national representative of the 41 Title V Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) under the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). NCUIH strives to improve the health of the over 70% of the AI/AN population that lives in urban areas, supported by quality, accessible health care centers.