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## **The Fort Sill Apache Tribe Celebrates First Reservation Anniversary**

*Tribal members speak out on importance of returning to ancestral lands and proposed tribal name change*

**Fort Sill Apache Reservation, Akela, New Mexico (November 16, 2012)** – The [Fort Sill Apache Tribe](#) today celebrated the one year anniversary of its Reservation Proclamation from the U.S. Department of the Interior on its reservation located in Akela, Luna County, New Mexico.

The Tribe was joined in celebration by local elected officials, which included Luna County Commissioner Joe “Oleo” Milo, Luna County Manager Kelly Kuenstler, and Las Cruces City Councilor Greg Smith.

“Today we celebrate the anniversary of this historic event with our community neighbor, the Fort Sill Apache Tribe. Economic development is a priority to Luna County and if the Tribe is successful in its endeavors to build a casino, this project will provide jobs to one of New Mexico’s highest unemployed counties,” said Luna County Commissioner Joe “Oleo” Milo.

Event speakers included Fort Sill Apache Tribal Chairman Jeff Haozous, who discussed the Tribe’s one year anniversary and provided an update on the Apache Homelands Casino. Chairman Haozous also announced his proposal to change the Tribe’s name to the Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe.

“Celebrating the anniversary of the Tribe’s Reservation Proclamation is a testament to our hard work in returning to New Mexico. While this is a momentous occasion, we are still on a journey to bring our Tribe home,” said Fort Sill Apache Tribal Chairman Jeff Haozous. “This is not only a celebration of success for us but for the local communities that have shown their support for the Tribe and Apache Homelands Casino.”

Tribal member Bob Haozous spoke of his desire to connect with his ancestral home.



“We have an opportunity that only the Apache can fulfill because we came from here and thrived on land when no one else could,” said Bob Haozous.

In 1968, the U.S. Indian Claims Commission (ICC) determined that the Fort Sill Apache Tribe was the legal successor of the Chiricahua Apache Indians, which comprised the Chiricahua, Warm Springs, Nednais and Bedonkhe bands. These four Apache bands once lived in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona until their forced removal as Prisoners of War following the surrender of one of their leaders, Geronimo.

The ICC went on to find that the Tribe had been in possession of 14 million acres of land in New Mexico and Arizona and that this land had been illegally taken from the Tribe. These landmark decisions were approved by the U.S. Supreme Court.

While they always maintained their status as a tribe, the Chiricahua and Warm Springs bands of Apaches’ government-to-government relationship with the United States, which was severed during the imprisonment, was restored in 1976 when they organized with a constitution as the federally recognized Fort Sill Apache Tribe.

After receiving an invitation from the Governor of New Mexico in 1995 and again in 2000 to return to New Mexico, the Tribe purchased the property at Akela Flats in 1998 and was granted a Reservation in November 2011. The Tribe is seeking equality with other New Mexico Tribes and Pueblos to game on its property.

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