

# **Jean Whitehorse – UNPFII Intervention Speech (24th Session)**

**2025**

My name is Jean Whitehorse. I am Diné—daughter of a Navajo Code Talker, boarding school survivor, and a victim of the U.S. government’s forced sterilization program.

Between 1907 and 1987, more than 70,000 Native American women were sterilized without consent by Indian Health Services and private physicians. This federally sanctioned violation of our reproductive rights was genocide. I am one of those women. After a medical emergency, I was coerced into signing a form at an IHS facility in Gallup, New Mexico. I later learned it ended my ability to bear children. My name means “Many Children,” but I have only one daughter.

Six years ago, I stood before this forum and shared my story. In response, the UN Permanent Forum committed to a global study on forced sterilization. Today, I return to say: that promise remains unfulfilled.

Forced sterilization violates international law. It breaches Articles 19–24 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirm the right to informed consent and health autonomy. It meets the definition of a Crime Against Humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It is recognized as sex-based violence under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and as torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment under the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT). The United States must be held accountable.

These acts stole our futures, severed our connection to motherhood, and inflicted intergenerational trauma. We urge this forum to adopt the Indigenous Health Measurement Instrument (Item 4) to guide a UN Global Study on these crimes, ensuring Indigenous women’s voices and knowledge lead the way.

From Peru to Canada, Greenland, India, Eastern Europe, and beyond, Indigenous women have faced the same violations. In 2024, the UN ruled Peru’s sterilization campaign of 300,000 Indigenous women a Crime Against Humanity. That ruling sets a precedent. Justice must also come now to the United States.

We respectfully demand:

- (1) A full investigation into U.S. sterilization programs; (2) Reparations for victims and families;
- (3) Immediate global end to these procedures; (4) A formal apology from the U.S. government.

We will not be silent.

Justice must be served.