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Statement from Director Kevin Gover on Suzan Harjo and Receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom

I wish to congratulate my colleague and friend, Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne & Hodulgee Muscogee), on being named one of 19 recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. The awards will be presented by President Barack Obama at the White House on Nov. 24, 2014.

Suzan has worked tirelessly on behalf of Native peoples as an activist, journalist and leader. Her list of achievements is long and include being the founding president of the Morning Star Institute, a national Native rights organization that promotes Native Peoples' traditions, culture and arts. She is one of seven Native people who filed the 1992 landmark lawsuit, *Harjo et al v. Pro Football, Inc.*, regarding the name of the Washington, D.C., football team. Her social and political activism dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when she was news director for the American Indian Press Association and producer of *Seeing Red*, the first Indian news show in the United States, on WBAI-FM Radio in New York. As a special assistant for Indian legislation in President Carter's administration, she was principal author of the "President's Report to Congress on American Indian Religious Freedom." She served as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1984 through 1989.

Dr. Harjo's history and relationship with the museum began over two decades ago as a founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian (1990–1996). She began work in 1967 that led to the NMAI, to repatriation law, and to reform of national museum policies dealing with Native Americans. She was a trustee of NMAI's predecessor museum and collection in New York City from 1980 to 1990, and was NMAI's first Program Planning Committee chair and principal author of

the NMAI policies on Exhibits (1994), Indian Identity (1993), and Repatriation (1991), and as director of the 2004-2005 NMAI Native Languages Archives Repository Project. She now serves as guest curator for the recently opened exhibition, *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations*, and as editor of the accompanying publication of the same name.

I could not be more proud to see Suzan join the company of such illuminaries and cultural influencers such as Ben Bradlee, Dr. Maya Angelou and Sen. Daniel Inouye. She and Sen. Inouye were there to sign the MOU that transferred the collection from the Museum of the American Indian to the Smithsonian Institution on May 8, 1989. Her continued work as an inspiring leader and role model has made Indian Country proud and we support her as she receives this national recognition and well deserved honor!

Kevin Gover (Pawnee)

Director, National Museum of the American Indian

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