



PRESS RELEASE

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**BLOOMFIELD MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL
SECOND DEGREE MURDER CHARGE**

ALBUQUERQUE – This morning in federal court, Jasper Fernandez, 38, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation who resides in Bloomfield, N.M., entered a guilty plea to second degree murder under a plea agreement with the United States Attorney’s Office.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Fernandez was arrested on Feb. 22, 2012, on a criminal complaint charging him with the Nov. 4, 2011 murder of Vernita Jose, a 36-year-old Navajo woman. He subsequently was indicted on a second degree murder charge on March 13, 2012. Fernandez has been in federal custody since his arrest.

During today’s plea hearing, Fernandez admitted that he murdered Ms. Jose at a remote location in the Navajo Indian Reservation on the night of Nov. 4, 2011. Fernandez’s plea agreement states that he killed the victim during the course of an argument by forcibly holding the victim’s head against the inside of the car until she stopped breathing. The murder occurred shortly after Fernandez left a party where he had been drinking alcohol.

After burying the victim’s remains, Fernandez attempted to conceal the murder by driving the victim’s vehicle to an apartment complex in Farmington, N.M., located near her residence. Fernandez also took steps to establish an alibi by sending text messages to the victim’s phone. Court records reflect that the victim was reported missing as of Nov. 4, 2011, and that her murder was revealed when her remains were discovered on Dec. 16, 2011.

Under the terms of the plea agreement, Fernandez will be sentenced to a prison term of eight to ten years to be followed by a term of supervised release to be determined by the Court. Fernandez remains in custody pending his sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

The case was investigated by the Albuquerque and Farmington offices of the FBI, the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety and San Juan County Sheriff’s Office, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul H. Spiers.

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