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Verlon M. Jose  
CHAIRMAN

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Carla L. Johnson  
VICE CHAIRWOMAN

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Tuesday, March 10, 2026

## PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

### Tohono O'odham Nation Mourns the Passing of Dr. Selso Villegas

SELLS, Ariz. – It is with profound sadness that the Tohono O'odham Nation announces the passing of Dr. Selso Villegas, who left this world peacefully last night. Selso was a dedicated public servant, a brilliant scholar, mentor to many, and a tireless advocate for the O'odham and our sacred resources.

Selso served with distinction for more than 25 years as the first, and only, Executive Director of the Nation's Water Resources Department. His leadership was instrumental in securing our water rights and developing the Nation's landmark Climate Change Adaptation Plan. Most importantly, Selso was a pioneer in bridging traditional O'odham history and Himdag with modern science, ensuring that our stewardship of the land remained rooted in our cultural values.

Chairman Verlon M. Jose said, *"Today, the Tohono O'odham Nation has lost a revered leader. Dr. Selso Villegas was more than an Executive Director; he was a protector of our future. His life's work ensured that our children and grandchildren would have the water and natural resources necessary to thrive here on the Tohono O'odham Nation's ancestral lands."*

Chairman Jose went on to say, *"Selso carried our history and the wisdom of our elders into every negotiation, conference, and scientific study he worked on. He spoke for the water, the land, and the O'odham with unmatched clarity and passion. We extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and the many people whose lives he touched. His legacy is etched into the very landscape of the Nation he loved so dearly."*

Selso's contributions to Indigenous water rights and environmental resilience have earned him countless awards, national, and international respect, including the Indigenous Resiliency Award in 2024 from the University of Arizona. He was also a community advocate and worked extensively with organizations such as the Safety and Justice Challenge to combat racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Beyond his many professional accomplishments, Selso was also a mentor, teacher and role model to many. He inspired and taught younger generations how to carry forward our cultural values while protecting our natural resources.

Please keep his family and friends in your thoughts and prayers.

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*Together We Are Stronger*