



FORT MCKAY

FIRST NATION

Media statement

Fort McKay First Nation responds to Alberta's intention to fund research into the undocumented deaths and burials of Indigenous children at residential schools.

For immediate release: June 2, 2021

Since the news of an unmarked mass grave holding 215 Indigenous children at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, Fort McKay First Nation Chief and Council have remembered, reflected, and renewed their hope for truth, healing, and reconciliation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada travelled this country to document the atrocities of cultural genocide to which Indigenous peoples were subjected for over a century during the residential schools experiment. Reports and calls to action followed, as did many still unfulfilled promises. A renewed sense of urgency has amplified calls from around the world for funding and action.

People across this country cannot forget how the Kamloops discovery has made us collectively feel. Those emotions need to fuel actions and healing. We must learn and teach Canada's real history, including all the difficult and distressing episodes that many Canadians continue to question. We must acknowledge and challenge systemic racism. We must recognize the human toll that generations of Indigenous people have paid. We must do better.

When social media hashtags stop trending and the colours we wear return to our day-to-day rotation, the intergenerational trauma of the residential school experience remains – in communities without access to clean water or adequate health care and education, in memories too often repressed with substance use, in grief, and in the unmarked graves of those stolen children who weren't allowed to go home.

By institutional design, Fort McKay First Nation is one among many that was separated from our land, our culture, and our language through the residential school system. We continue to work to reclaim and revitalize all that defines us as Cree and Dene people even as we grieve and support our members who contend with the persistent residual impact of residential schools.



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Acts of reconciliation must be thoughtful, respectful, and meaningful. This is not a time to praise the leadership of politicians involved in not only the design of Canada, but in the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples. Alberta's announcement of its "intentions" was clearly reactionary, lacked detail, and is tainted by a colonial caretaker approach that may reflect nothing more than inexperience confronting issues in the Indigenous world head-on. Alberta, too, can do better.

Background

Moose Lake is the traditional home of what is now the Fort McKay First Nation. After hearing stories of neglect and abuse from the families of Indigenous children taken to attend residential schools, Cree and Dene families persuaded the Indian agent to build a day school at the Fort McKay fur trading post. Families then moved from Moose Lake to form a community that would enable their children to return home each night. Though this compromise meant children could remain at home, the move didn't happen without personal and cultural losses. Some children had already been taken to residential schools. Some members who came later to live in Fort McKay attended residential schools. And some never came home.

Fort McKay First Nation

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