

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

June 25, 2021

### FNLIC Comments on Rising Number of Indian Residential School Burial Sites

**(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.)** The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLIC) mourns with the Cowessess First Nation following their announcement of the preliminary finding of 751 unmarked graves located near the grounds of the former Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. The FNLIC extends its deepest condolences to the Nation, and to all communities, families, and peoples impacted by the growing numbers of confirmed gravesites at Indian Residential Schools sites across Turtle Island in the area of Kanáta (Canada). Countless unidentified and missing children were laid to rest in these graves – they deserve recognition, accountability, and justice from those who sanctioned and condoned the genocide that stole their lives.

The FNLIC would like to acknowledge the resiliency and fearless leadership of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc who, in undertaking the challenging but critical work to identify and honour the 215 children found buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, have paved the way for Indigenous-led efforts to investigate, identify, and commemorate Indian Residential School burial sites. Our hearts also go out to the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nation, who recently identified 104 potential graves at the former Brandon Indian Residential School in Manitoba, and to all other Nations currently undertaking the painful and traumatizing task of identifying and honouring stolen children. The FNLIC offers our support to these Nations, and to all residential school survivors, families, and Indigenous communities across Canada during these difficult times.

With the announcement from the Ontario government on June 15, 2021, that it would be investing \$10 million to survey, protect, and commemorate Indian Residential School burial sites across the province, the FNLIC calls upon the BC government to follow suit in a consistent and transparent manner, and to take every action to support and cooperate with First Nations in the province who not only need the funding to conduct their investigative and recovery efforts, but culturally appropriate, trauma-informed mental health supports. Along with the full implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, BC must hold itself and the Churches responsible, who are complicit in the state sponsored genocide, accountable, and work towards funding a comprehensive, Indigenous-led response to Indian Residential School burial sites.

“Through the immense bravery and leadership of Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir and the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc people, the floodgates have been opened to the full reality of the cruelty, violence, and atrocities committed by Canada's colonial regime. First Nations across the country will no longer accept silence and complacency; they are demanding justice, accountability, and meaningful action from federal and provincial governments and the Churches responsible. The Church needs to accept full responsibility, release all its Indian Residential School records, and trade in shallow placatory remarks for meaningful apologies through action. The FNLIC also calls upon the BC government to follow Ontario's lead and provide sustained, fulsome resources and funding to aid Indigenous-led efforts in recovering and honoring every single child that was left buried beneath



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the foundations of Canada's colonial institutions," stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

"Today's announcement of other burial sites at a former residential school in Saskatchewan is very disturbing and heartbreaking, but not surprising, as it continues to reflect the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As we have witnessed over the past few weeks, Canadians from all walks of life stand with us. It is now time for governments to fully do so, as well. First Nations across Canada deserve to know if and how many family members may be buried in locations at or near former Indian Residential School sites," added Lydia Hwitsum of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. "It is imperative that the federal and provincial governments strongly acknowledge these losses and work in concert with First Nations to find these 'lost children' and ensure they are cared for in a culturally appropriate manner."

"I feel a deep, heavy grief as we continue this journey of truth finding and work that has courageously been undertaken to expose the atrocities that have been committed against Indigenous peoples and our children in Canada. First Nations continue to mourn for the deliberately lost, hidden and stolen children," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "I can't imagine the despair and powerlessness felt by First Nations parents as they had their children torn from them. The children who survived and returned home from these "schools" were changed forever by the emotional, physical, and spiritual trauma they experienced at the hands of their government and church jailers. Going forward, all levels of governments and the churches will be expected to follow through with calls for action toward accountability and reparations. I would like to send my deep condolences to the First Nations communities who were forced to send their children to the Marieval Indian Residential School."

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

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