

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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Statement

June 30, 2021

UBCIC Chiefs Council Concludes Meeting to Advance Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation for Stolen Children of Indian Residential Schools

((Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – June 30, 2021) Today the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) held a special political forum, with the support of Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc, to focus on and advance actions around the remains of the 215 children found buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (KIRS), and to discuss the overarching issue of missing children and unmarked burials and mass graves that impacts all First Nations in BC and across Turtle Island.

Recognizing the need to support Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc and all other Nations currently undertaking the painful, traumatizing task of identifying and honouring stolen children, today’s UBCIC Chiefs Council meeting provided a safe and integral space for First Nations to gather, work together, and set out their collective views on the work ahead – the critical work of searching former residential school sites, collecting records, and finding each and every stolen child so they can be returned to their families and communities and given the dignity of a name, identity, and a proper resting place.

“As the devastating truth about the missing children who attended KIRS reverberated around the world, exposing the undeniable fact that this was a genocide sanctioned and condoned by Canada and the Catholic Church against First Nations peoples, it is evident that the work to achieve accountability, reparations, and supports for residential school survivors remains elusive. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued several Calls to Action (71-76) to the federal government and the churches to identify the locations of unmarked graves and to identify the missing children. They did this because they lacked a mandate or resources to tackle this critical matter. It was made clear that truth and reconciliation is not possible without justice for these missing children – justice that survivors continue to call for and justice that Canada has failed to deliver. It is from this immense need to obtain closure for those grieving and healing from Canada’s colonial regime, that we gathered in solidarity today to discuss the next steps forward,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC. “Today, we heard from Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir who detailed the immense work Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc are doing to chart a path forward to justice and peace for survivors and families, including requesting that the Church enter into a Covenant with Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc to renounce this conduct that denied children their human rights, and saw so many children disappear and never return

home. The Church has been reluctant to acknowledge their role in the atrocities, and they have yet to accept full responsibility for its role, and even sought to get out of the obligations they committed to when the class action was settled in 2006. For truth, justice, and reconciliation to be advanced, the Catholic entities and the Holy See must cooperate fully with First Nations, release all its Indian Residential School records, and commit to new covenants with First Nations. UBCIC continues to stand with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and celebrates that UBCIC was established in Tk'emlúps territory – shaped and uplifted by the courageous survivors of that generation who ensured that the UBCIC of today continues the fight for the rights of our people.”

“Since the news around KIRS broke, the number of confirmed mass graves in Canada and the United States continues to rise steadily over the past weeks, including today, and this number will continue to rise far into the future. UBCIC extends our deepest condolences to all Nations, communities, families, and peoples impacted. Our meeting today made clear that while the path forward is long and filled with many challenges, Indigenous peoples are emboldened and empowered – we are here, together, to ensure our governments and institutions do not stray from the path of reconciliation, provide First Nations with adequate funding and supports, and prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of residential school survivors,” stated Chief Don Tom, Vice-President of the UBCIC. “Today we heard UN Special Rapporteur Francisco Cali Tzay address Canada’s failure to fully implement the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report recommendations and call upon Canada to conduct a full investigation of the circumstances and responsibilities around residential school deaths. UBCIC joins the UN Special Rapporteur’s call for Canada to ensure reparations for the genocide committed are not only economic, but cultural, spiritual, and in full acknowledgement of the atrocities that took place in residential schools.”

“UBCIC raises our hands to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc for their guidance in planning the forum, and for their resiliency and bravery as they help pave the way for Indigenous-led efforts to investigate, identify, and protect unmarked burials and mass graves at former residential schools. Through their support and leadership, UBCIC advanced and passed Resolution 2021-29 “Demanding Justice and Accountability for the Missing and Unidentified Children of Residential Schools,” stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of UBCIC. “Resolution 2021-29 represents an enormous and meaningful step forward; it provides thorough and comprehensive directives for the federal and provincial governments and the Catholic Church/Holy See to rectify their failure to document and protect the stolen children of residential schools, and to treat unmarked burials and mass graves as evidence of mass human rights violations of national and international concern. In passing this Resolution, the UBCIC Chiefs Council calls upon BC and Canada to provide immediate funding and supports to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, and other impacted First Nations, as they develop and implement frameworks and processes to further identify, document, maintain, commemorate, and protect the remains of the children found buried at residential school sites.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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