



31 May 2021

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The Right Hon. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, PC, MP
Office of the Prime Minister, 80 Wellington St
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Sent via email: pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister,

This past Friday, the old wounds of my people and of other Indigenous peoples were reopened in a most visceral way. We are heartbroken at the devastating confirmation of 215 children found in unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Our profound sadness layers the gaping wounds still felt by many Residential School Survivors and their families today. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc community, and the families of all the little ones, who are most intimately affected by this indescribable sorrow.

As the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada found, the federal government was responsible for a grave lack of measures to guarantee the health and safety of residential school students. This “failure to establish and enforce adequate standards, coupled with the failure to adequately fund the schools, resulted in unnecessarily high death rates at residential schools.” There were many causes of death, including Tuberculosis, accidents, and even suicides, and the terrible maltreatment is undeniable. The TRC Final Report, Vol. IV: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials states “Indian Affairs official Marin Benson wrote in 1914 that students at the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario were being “disciplined to death.” It continues “Because there was no policy, there was no limit on the number of blows or the degree of injury that could be inflicted. There are reports of corporal punishment so severe... These include reports from schools in Brantford...”

But this failure of the federal government was built on an earlier crime: the forcible removal of our children from their parents, families, and communities. Imposed by federal legislation, and facilitated by the cravenness of many politicians who failed to speak out against this, the theft of our children was a crime that is only beginning to come to the attention of the wider world. No parent should ever have their children taken from them by the unchecked power of a government seeking to rob them of their identity, their spirit, their home, their culture. No government can replace a child’s own parents.

The Mohawk Institute, commonly known as the Mush Hole, was one of the first of the Residential Schools and had the longest-running history. This meant it was unregulated and unaccountable from the start. With the discovery of the 215 children in Kamloops, there are no excuses for not taking aggressive action to find all the lost ones at any such locations across Canada, including the Mohawk Institute.

As the UN Special Rapporteur has noted, this removal of our children was one of the “notable episodes and patterns of devastating human rights violations” that our people have endured. “Thousands of indigenous children did not survive the experience and some of them are buried in unidentified graves. Generations of those who survived grew up estranged from their cultures and languages, with debilitating effects on the maintenance of their indigenous identity... The residential school period continues to cast a long shadow of despair on indigenous communities, and many of the dire social and economic problems faced by aboriginal peoples are linked to that experience.” The UN specifies that mass graves must not be treated simply as archeological finds that fall under culture and traditions. This is extremely serious.

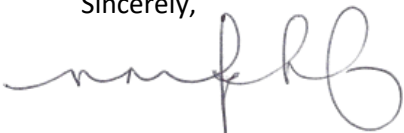
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action numbers 71-76 on *Missing Children and Burial Information* must be addressed. June 2nd will mark the 6th anniversary of the release of the TRC Calls to Action, and their implementation is overdue. As the TRC Final Report states, “For the most part, the cemeteries that the Commission documented are abandoned, disused, and vulnerable to accidental disturbance.” This is unacceptable.

There is a lot of work to be done. Documentation needs to be studied and preserved. The school cemeteries need to be protected and maintained. The dead must be honoured, and the survivors must be heard. In particular, “A national program, carried out in close consultation with the concerned Aboriginal communities, is required to complete the task of identifying the many unmarked residential school cemeteries and gravesites across Canada.”

Six Nations of the Grand River is the largest First Nation in Canada and we are calling on you, Prime Minister, to take action in equipping Six Nations to immediately conduct a comprehensive search for missing children on and around the grounds of the former Mohawk Institute. I am available to speak with you directly to discuss how we can expedite the search using the latest ground penetrating radar technology. We must find all of our missing children. Six Nations is committed to working with Canada to bring healing to survivors and to honour the memory of so many little ones.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our deepest sympathies for Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation and for all the victims’ families and communities. May the Creator grant rest to our lost children, comfort to those who loved them, and justice and peace to our communities, and may we all leave this world – and Canada – a better place.

Sincerely,



Chief Mark B. Hill
Six Nations of the Grand River

cc: The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, premier@ontario.ca
The Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, carolyn.bennett@parl.gc.ca
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The community of Six Nations of the Grand River