

Issue: Unmarked Graves at Former Residential Schools

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action:

- #71. We call upon all chief coroners and provincial vital statistics agencies that have not provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada their records on the deaths of Aboriginal children in the care of residential school authorities to make these documents available to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- #72. We call upon the federal government to allocate sufficient resources to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to allow it to develop and maintain the National Residential School Student Death Register established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- #73. We call upon the federal government to work with churches, Aboriginal communities, and former residential school students to establish and maintain an online registry of residential school cemeteries, including, where possible, plot maps showing the location of deceased residential school children.
- #74. We call upon the federal government to work with the churches and Aboriginal community leaders to inform the families of children who died at residential schools of the child's burial location, and to respond to families' wishes for appropriate commemoration ceremonies and markers, and reburial in home communities where requested.
- #75. We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.
- #76. We call upon the parties engaged in the work of documenting, maintaining, commemorating, and protecting residential school cemeteries to adopt strategies in accordance with the following principles:
 - i. The Aboriginal community most affected shall lead the development of such strategies.
 - ii. Information shall be sought from residential school Survivors and other Knowledge Keepers in the development of such strategies.
 - iii. Aboriginal protocols shall be respected before any potentially invasive technical inspection and investigation of a cemetery site.

Background:

- On May 27, 2021, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc announced that they had found the remains 215 children from the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in a mass unmarked grave near the Residential School site. Since this discovery, there have been similar efforts from First Nations across Canada, including Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan, to carry out searches of former residential school sites to discover the truth about missing children who attended these institutions.

Suggested Messaging:

- For healing to occur there must be a public acknowledgement of the legacy of Residential Schools and commemoration of what they stood for. Public acknowledgement needs to focus on coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward
- We are at the start of a long journey of healing, we can work to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action while being respectful of our survivors and families, and respectful of their cultural protocols.