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For Immediate Release

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Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Responds to Recent Findings of Remains of 215 Children in Kamloops BC

The Epekwitk Assembly of Councils issued the following statement in response to the news of the remains of 215 children being found at the grounds of the former Residential School in Kamloops BC:

Our hearts truly break for each and every person affected by the recent discovery of 215 First Nations children that attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School. This event reopens a wound that has barely had a chance to start to heal, for these families and all First Nations of Turtle Island.

Let this be a reminder to all of Canada: Residential schools are not from a 'distant past'. Not even by a long shot. These long-standing Residential schools were created to "Kill the Indian in the child" as stated by the Canadian Government. They started in the 1800's and the last Residential school only closed its doors in 1996.

The effects, traumas, and horrors that the First Nations children forced to attend Residential schools faced, the devastation the parents felt who lost their children to them, are a reality they live with every day.

In this recent news of these horrific findings, let Canada remember that the pain felt and the loss caused by Residential schools still exists, and is very real.

"We send our prayers to those who lost their children to the Kamloops Indian Residential school both years ago and again in the past few days on learning their fate. We send our prayers to all that have had the pain of losing a part of themselves – be it their children, their language, their own parents, their culture, their identity – to Indian Residential schools." Chief Darlene Bernard, Lennox Island First Nation.

"We stand with our Brothers and Sisters in Kamloops, B.C. and across this Nation. Your pain is our pain. Our hearts are with you." Chief Junior Gould, Abegweit First Nation.

Msit No'kmaq - All My Relations.

Background

Missing Children:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) noted that large numbers of Indigenous children who were sent to residential schools never returned to their home communities. Some children ran away, and others died at the schools. The students who did not return have come to be known as the Missing Children. The Missing Children Project documents the deaths and the burial places of children who died while attending the schools. To date, more than 4,100 children who died while attending a residential school have been identified.

(Source: <http://www.trc.ca/events-and-projects/missing-children-project.html>)

The Kamloops Indian Residential School:

Dates of Operation May 19, 1890 - July 31, 1978

The Kamloops Industrial School (later known as the Kamloops Indian Residential School) was opened, under Roman Catholic administration, in 1890. It became the largest school in the Indian Affairs residential school system. Enrolment peaked in the early 1950s at 500. In 1910, the principal said that the government did not provide enough money to properly feed the students. In 1924, a portion of the school was destroyed by fire. In 1969, the federal government took over the administration of the school, which no longer provided any classes and operated it as residence for students attending local day schools until 1978, when the residence was closed. (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation)

(Source: <https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/entities/46>)