



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

**Press release
For immediate distribution**

Disturbing impacts of residential schools continue to surface: 215 Indigenous children found dead in British Columbia

Kahnawake, May 31, 2021 — There has been a wave of consternation in Canada and the provinces since the discovery of the bodies of 215 Indigenous children. They were found in a mass grave at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. This institution, run by the Catholic Church, was once the largest school in Canada's residential school system until it closed in 1969. Set up to eradicate Indigenous culture, approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were separated from their families and brought against their will to these schools across Canada. With the goal of "killing the Indian in the child" and erasing all traces of their Indigenous traditions, the methods of assimilation were accompanied by mistreatment, malnutrition and physical, psychological and sexual abuse documented by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Survivors of the residential school reported many abuses, including the use of electric chairs, child handcuffs, and many other instruments dedicated to pain.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* examined the residential school system in Canada, resulting in 94 calls to action and recommendations for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Following the release of its report, the Commission called residential schools the central tool of Indigenous cultural genocide. It is time for Canada to admit, as the MMIGW report, recognizes, that indigenous peoples have been victims not only of cultural genocide, but of genocide under international human rights law.

The discovery of these bodies announced last week is totally shocking, but not surprising, considering all the disturbing events experienced in the past. It forces us to believe that the search for the truth by the families and loved ones of the residents is far from over. Quebec Native Women (hereafter QNW) wishes to express its support to all those who are devastated by this sad news, which unfortunately brings back painful memories of Canada's colonial past.

These children who were found dead were never documented by the school. As a result, an investigation is underway to try to identify their identities and their families. QNW hopes that this investigation will also allow for a dignified burial of each child found dead in order to pay them a just tribute.

Bill 79 (An Act to authorize the communication of personal information to the families of missing or deceased Indigenous children following their admission to an institution) of the Government of Quebec is currently undergoing detailed study in parliamentary committee. It is intended to support families of missing or murdered Indigenous children in their search for information about the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or

death of their children following their admission to an institution. In its submission to the Commission, QNW called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to ensure an independent search. To date, parliamentary work does not appear to be moving in this direction.

Considering the discovery of these 215 bodies of Indigenous children on the site of a former residential school, some of which could be from Quebec communities, we ask the Quebec government to act in this sense in order to give the families a real truth.

QNW stands wholeheartedly with the grieving families in this heartbreaking process: we join our voices with those of Indigenous families and organizations across Canada in calling on governments to commit the resources necessary to uncover the identity of the children, and the causes and reasons for their deaths. *"The deaths of approximately 3,200 children have been identified by the TRC, and these 215 that have just been found have never been documented. This leads us to believe that the number of deaths of Indigenous children in residential schools is much higher than that."* says Viviane Michel, President of QNW.

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