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'Our peoples deserve an apology and so much more': Alvin Fiddler

The mass grave of an estimated 215 children found at the Kamloops Indian Residential School has caused a reckoning in the halls of the House and **Senate** and across the country as evidence of one of many 'acts of genocide' perpetrated by **Canada**.

Samantha Wright Allen

Murray Sinclair

Former Senator and former head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)
June 1, official statement:

"When I was asked to chair the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, I thought that I had a pretty good idea of what to expect. Discovering what was going on in the schools, I thought, would be accomplished by listening to what the survivors told us and recording their stories. I undertook that part of the work openly and willingly, with what I thought was a good understanding of what they were going to tell us.

"But the stories from the survivors proved to be horrendous. One of the most common stories that we heard were from survivors who talked about the children who died in the schools and whose deaths they witnessed. Just as often, we heard about the loneliness and separation from their family-how they lost so much.

"One aspect of residential schools that really proved to be quite shocking to me personally, was the stories that we began to gather of the children who died in the schools. Of the children who died, sometimes deliberately, it was at the hands of others who were there, and in such large numbers.

"Survivors talked about children who suddenly went missing. Some talked about children who went missing into mass burial sites. Some survivors talked about infants who were born to young girls at the residential schools, infants who had been fathered by priests, were taken away from them and deliberately killed - sometimes thrown into furnaces, we were told.

"We had no expectation that this would be a part of the work we were doing. We asked the government to allow us to conduct a fuller inquiry to that part of the work of the TRC, to explore that on behalf of the survivors and **Canadian** public. We submitted a proposal, as it was not within the mandate of the TRC, and that request was denied. So largely we did what we could, but it was not anywhere near what we needed to investigate. Now we are seeing evidence of the large number of children who died.

"We know there are lots of sites similar to Kamloops that are going to come to light in the future. We need to begin to prepare ourselves for that. ...

"Since the revelation of what has happened at Kamloops has come to light, I have been inundated with calls from Survivors. Hundreds of calls, often just to cry. I can hear not only the pain and the anguish, but also the anger that no one believed the stories they had told. I can also hear their sense that they have lost some hope that maybe those children that hadn't returned might still be found. They now know that may not happen.

"My heart goes out to the Survivors, the children and families of Survivors who never made it back. I know this is a hard time. But we must persevere in our investigation that we must know what happened at these schools. We need to ensure that we put in place healing programs and foundations that will help survivors to gather and share their memories and stories."

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde
June 1, The Globe and Mail:

"Kamloops is one school. I've said before that the residential school system was a genocide against First Nations people, Indigenous peoples. Here is the evidence. Nobody can deny that."

Independent Senator Jane McCallum
June 1, 2021 in the **Senate**:

"These were 215 beautiful, innocent, trusting little spirits that believed in their hearts that it would all work out. They missed their families and never understood how they came to be where they were.

"One of my most persistent emotions in residential school was overwhelming loneliness and the bewildering feeling of abandonment. It was so unlike my family. I came to realize that abandonment by my parents was not the issue but that I was abandoned by the system - whether it was the church or the government who initiated and perpetuated the kidnappings.

"This is **Canada**. Our hearts are broken. **Canada** is broken."

NDP MP Leah Gazan

June 1, during the House's take note-debate

["Unfortunately, this tragedy is not the first time we have discovered the remains of little children around these schools. Acts of genocide were more the norm and not the exception. According to the TRC, at least 40 per cent to 60 per cent of children who attended these schools died. ..."](#)

"Families were left without answers about where their loved ones were, like at Brandon Residential School. The bodies of more than 50 children were discovered on the institution's grounds in 2019. It is now being used as a private campground, and survivors and impacted family members, including Jennifer Rattray, are working to find closure, as she stated in a CBC interview [June 1]:. She said: 'The families and communities whose children were lost while attending these schools have questions that deserve answers. The children buried at these sites must have their identities restored and their stories told. They will never be forgotten.'

"Can members imagine having to ask permission to honour the remains of children who perished as a result of genocide? ...

"The fact is that genocide against Indigenous people is so normalized that it actually needs to be discussed. Even in death, our children are disrespected and disregarded. Families, survivors, and communities need closure, and the spirits of our lost children need to be nurtured. They need to be put to rest. They need peace."

Métis Nation of Alberta President Audrey Poitras
Press release, June 1:

"We know that at least 25 such schools operated in Alberta. We welcome Minister [Rick] Wilson's recent announcement of funding to search for similar burial sites in this province, and we hope that the Alberta government's actions will be more than performative and that they will stand up for Indigenous rights across all areas of our lives.

"For many years, it was up to us to do the heartbreaking work of finding our lost children. Thanks to the tireless work of Métis advocates like Muriel Stanley Venne and those with the Remembering Children Society, some Métis and First Nation families now know the fate of their relatives. But there is so much more work to be done. ...

"The trauma of residential schools was experienced by Métis people across the country, though it is often overlooked, including by all levels of government. True reconciliation can only exist once the traumas of the past are addressed at all levels of government and society."

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler
Statement, May 31, 2021:

"Our peoples are grieving, in mourning for the children we have lost-not just at the Kamloops school but at all the schools across **Canada** where our children died and their deaths were left undocumented. Nothing was said or recorded. No police investigations took place.

"We call on **Canada** to come clean. They must treat the deaths of our children as they do any other child in this country and full, unhampered or biased probes must occur that involve Indigenous experts and authorities. There can be no more hiding. Our children and families deserve justice and truth. Again, it is necessary for us to press **Canada** to urgently prioritize resources and bring home all the lost children. Find the resources. All former residential school grounds must be searched if the communities wish them to be.

"Our stories are not complete when we do not know where our children are. They deserve to be found and to be home.

"Once again, I call on Pope Francis and the Catholic Church to come clean on their crimes against our children and apologize

for the significant role they played in the Indian Residential School System, which was in place in this country from the mid-1800s to 1996.

"Our peoples deserve an apology and so much more. ...

"Those who did not return have come to be known as the Missing Children and 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](#), but we understand thousands more are out there waiting to come home.

"After decades of silence, **Canada** must do the right thing. Miigwetch."

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister **Carolyn Bennett**
June 3, during the MMIWG action plan announcement:

"**Canadians** are now confronted with the truth and the need to understand. Once you know the truth you can't unknow the truth, it compels all of us to be part of the essential work of decolonization, healing, and reconciliation."

Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**
June 1, 2021, during the House's take-note debate:

"Children's shoes and moccasins, a teddy bear, flowers, those are what surround the Centennial Flame, just steps away from this House, to honour the Indigenous children who never returned home because of the residential school system. Those tiny shoes should not have to be there, because children should never have been taken away to those so-called schools, places where they were separated from their families and their communities, places where they faced terrible loneliness, places where they suffered unthinkable abuse."

NDP MP Charlie Angus May 31, on Facebook:

"How does one even imagine this crime? The Catholic Church refused to pay their share of the compensation owed under the residential school agreement. The Pope ignored the call of Parliament to issue the apology. The religious orders have never turned over all the documents. Government lawyers suppressed the evidence and the names of the predators at St. Anne's residential school. We need forensic investigations at all sites. How many children are still missing?

"I say this as someone who went through the Catholic school system. As a white child I never saw a classmate thrown down the stairs and killed. I never saw children sexually assaulted. I never heard about children being buried in hidden unmarked graves. And yet these things happened to First Nation children. The institutions, orders, and government that allowed these crimes to occur have never been held accountable. This must change."

Liberal MP Jaime Battiste

June 1, during the House's take note-debate:

"I have spoken in the House before about the TRC findings that one in 25 children who went to these schools did not come home. In comparison, one in 26 soldiers who served in World War II did not come home. World War II lasted six years, whereas many Indian residential schools lasted more than 40 years.

"Tragically, we now see the evidence. We now have heard the proof of what the TRC has stated, what authors like Isabelle Knockwood wrote in her book *Out of the Depths* about the residential school in Shubenacadie. Tragically, we are hearing the information now in our heads. Many of us are now feeling it in our hearts as well. It is within our hands to take action with the head, the heart, and the hands."

NDP MP Mumilaq Qaqqaq

June 1, during the House's take note-debate:

"Indigenous peoples do not want their shame, guilt, or even, to an extent, the thoughts and prayers of non-Indigenous peoples. What Indigenous peoples are calling for throughout the country is action and for this to be treated for what it is. It is a crime. What we are seeing is history. It is one of the biggest crimes to happen in **Canada**."

Non-affiliated Senator Patti LaBoucane-Benson

June 1, in the Senate:

"[W]e must also acknowledge the children who survived. Many of us have heard the devastating recollections of survivors who were made to dig graves for their classmates, brothers, sisters, and cousins forced to grieve the loss of their family alone. The whispers of school violence, death, and despair passed on through the generations.

"We acknowledge that families were not allowed the dignity of notification and were left to wonder what happened to their children who didn't return home. They were not allowed the peace of mind required to grieve and accept the loss of their child. The intergenerational grief and loss of Indigenous families remains one of the heaviest burdens of historic trauma."

Upper Nicola Band's Chief Harvey McLeod
Attended Kamloops Indian Residential School, 1966-68
May 28, 2021, [CKPG Today](#), and repeated by Conservative **MP Dan Albas** June 1:

"I know people that just disappeared, and we assumed that they ran away and got away and are at home somewhere, but never did see them again. We as communities and leadership will find the best way of doing this and taking care of our people. We want to all be on the same page when it comes to having the ceremony to bring our people home."

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole
June 1, during the House's take-note debate:

"This weekend, my nine-year-old son, Jack, asked me why the flags were at half-mast in **Ottawa**. I had the difficult task of explaining to my son the terrible news of the graves of children found at the site of a residential school. 'Kids are not supposed to die at school, Dad,' he told me. Sometimes the moral clarity of a child reminds us of our responsibilities as Parliamentarians."

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh
June 1, during the House's take-note debate

"I want to point out very clearly that, while we are reeling from this loss and this horrible discovery, we have to also acknowledge that injustice continues to happen. The Prime Minister and the **Liberal government** are, at this very moment, fighting Indigenous kids in court despite multiple **Canadian** Human Rights Tribunal decisions. Despite multiple orders from the Human Rights Tribunal, the government is fighting these kids in court. The **Liberal government** is fighting survivors of residential schools in court right now."

Bloc Quebecois Leader Yves-Francois Blanchet
June 1, during the House's take-note debate:

"Before we can do any political analysis, which in some ways is fairly simple, we must deal with the constant agony of knowing that, by God, we did this. It is not just 215 children near Kamloops. It is potentially thousands of children because they came from nations whose land was being appropriated, and the white colonizer despised and envied them at the same time. After all these years of suspecting this, it is now increasingly clear. We are starting to see the light, or better yet, we know that we could see the light. We can get to the bottom of this. Beyond the commissions, the analyses, the words, the commemorations, or before all that, there needs to be knowledge without complacency."

Green Parliamentary Leader Elizabeth May
June 1, during the House's take-note debate: "I find it very sobering and distressing to realize that in 2009 there was a request from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for \$1.5-million to begin the project to find the burial sites of the missing children ripped from their families and never, ever allowed to go home because they had died. We know that it was not this minister's government that turned down that request for \$1.5-million, but why have we delayed so long?"

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