

Assembly of First Nations

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Assemblée des Premières Nations

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SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY December 2-3-4, 2025, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no. 70/2025

TITLE: First Nations Access to Archival Metadata with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

SUBJECT: Truth and Reconciliation

MOVED BY: Kúkwpi7 Rosanne Casimir, Tkemlúps te Secwépemc, BC

SECONDED BY: Marletts Kaloucoovale, Proxy, Ahousaht First Nation, BC

DECISION: Approved by the AFN Executive Committee by consensus.

WHEREAS:

- A. First Nations in British Columbia (BC) are leading critical work to identify, document, and honour children who died or went missing while attending Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and associated institutions, including research into unmarked burials and student deaths, work that is foundational to truth, justice, and healing.
- B. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), established through the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), holds and manages records documenting the history and legacy of the residential school system and has the mandate to make these records accessible to Survivors, their families and communities, researchers, educators, and the public in accordance with privacy and access legislation.
- C. The BC Indian Residential School Technical Working Group (TWG) has raised serious concerns that the NCTR has eliminated community researchers' ability to access and download archival metadata, descriptive information essential to identifying and organizing records, thereby undermining the efficiency and integrity of First Nations-led research and creating barriers to exercising the right to truth.
- D. The TWG has also identified concerns with the NCTR's Missing Children Project, including insufficient and inconsistent community consultation, duplication of work already being carried out by First Nations research teams, and lack of clarity regarding datasets on burial sites reportedly held or transferred by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).
- E. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the Government of Canada has adopted without qualification and committed to implement, affirms:

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- i. Article 18(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures.
- ii. Article 26: Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired, including the right to control and protect cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and intellectual property.

F. The TWG, composed of representatives from BC First Nations conducting IRS investigations, provides collective technical support and coordination to lead communities across the province and is actively working to secure access to NCTR records and to safeguard First Nations-led research.

G. Supporting documentation, including the June 18, 2025, Briefing Note from the TWG regarding the NCTR, outlines detailed concerns and recommendations and is attached to this resolution for reference.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

- 1. Fully support the British Columbia Indian Residential School Technical Working Group (TWG) and any interested First Nations in their efforts to protect First Nations' access to archival metadata and to ensure that all research regarding missing children and unmarked burials is led by and accountable to First Nations.
- 2. Calls upon the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) to immediately restore and maintain full community researcher access to download archival metadata in its internal database, subject to privacy severance provisions under section 9 of the *National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Act*, and to clearly identify any legal restrictions on records.
- 3. Urges First Nations with existing Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with the NCTR to amend their agreements to explicitly guarantee access to and the ability to download metadata.
- 4. Directs the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to work with the TWG, NCTR, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC), Survivors' organizations, and other like-minded partners to:
 - a. obtain clarity and access regarding any burial site datasets;
 - b. ensure NCTR community consultation processes are led by and accountable to First Nations; and
 - c. advocate that federal resources prioritize and support First Nations-led research teams and not duplicate their work.
- 5. Directs the AFN to seek federal and provincial funding, including from CIRNAC, ISC, and other appropriate sources, to support these advocacy efforts and to ensure that First Nations have the technical and financial resources necessary to carry out this critical research.

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