



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Special Chiefs Assembly

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is located on the unceded unsundered Territory of the Algonquin People.

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa (Ontario)

Ottawa est située sur le territoire non cédé et non abandonné du peuple algonquin.



Residential Schools and Unmarked Graves

History

The Canadian Residential School System existed for over 100 years. Residential schools were not schools but rather institutions of assimilation and genocide, which were designed to forcibly remove First Nations children from their families and eliminate their ties with their culture and nations. Residential schools implemented a government-mandated policy of cultural genocide and erasure against First Nations peoples. On May 27, 2021, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc announced that they had found the remains of 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 efforts from First Nations across Canada to carry out similar searches of former residential school sites to discover the truth about missing children who attended these institutions.

On June 8, 2022, Kimberly Murray, a member of the Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk Nation, was appointed as the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools. The Special Interlocutor works closely and collaboratively with First Nations leaders, communities, Survivors, families, and experts to identify the needed measures and recommend a new federal legal framework to ensure the respectful and culturally-appropriate treatment and protection of unmarked graves and burial sites of children at former residential schools.

AFN's recent advocacy

On March 30, 2023, the Vatican formally repudiated the "Doctrine of Discovery," officially declaring that a historic policy used to justify colonial exploitation is "not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church." The repudiation of this doctrine is long overdue. It will require more effort and commitment from the Catholic Church regarding how they will begin to enact meaningful change following this announcement. The AFN wants to ensure that policy and legislation measures in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* Action Plan reflect the rescinding and repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

The Special Interlocutor held the Fifth Annual National Gathering on Unmarked Burials in Montreal, Québec, in September 2023, focusing on supporting the search and recovery of missing children. In June 2023, the Special Interlocutor released their interim report, which identified the common concerns that Survivors, families, and communities have identified as they search and recover missing children and unmarked burials. The Interim report also details the Special Interlocutor's 48 findings based on First Nations' concerns. The AFN made a submission to the Special Interlocutor as they began drafting their final report that is set to be released in 2024.

In June 2022, the House of Commons introduced Bill C-29, *An Act to Provide for the Establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation*. This enactment provides for the establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation as an independent, non-political, permanent, and Indigenous-led organization whose purpose is to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. While the AFN generally supports establishing a National Council for Reconciliation, there are concerns around the selection criteria of the seats, with four identified from National First Nations organizations and nine remaining unknown. This would leave the Government of



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Special Chiefs Assembly

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is located on the unceded unsurrendered Territory of the Algonquin People.

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS
Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa (Ontario)

Ottawa est située sur le territoire non cédé et non abandonné du peuple algonquin.



Canada to appoint representatives that may not reflect community-based interests over reconciliation or have a direct and accountable reporting link to First Nations.

The AFN submitted a position paper and letter to the Senate of Canada in early November 2023, highlighting concerns on Bill C-29. The AFN advocated for more First Nations representation on the Council with guaranteed funding until all 94 Calls to Action are implemented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report.

Next Steps

The AFN continues to demand the full implementation of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action and complete transparency regarding documents and information in the possession of the federal government and Catholic church entities. The AFN remains committed to ensuring First Nations have the resources to carry out searches into unmarked graves at former residential school sites and that those responsible are held accountable. Furthermore, the AFN feels strongly that there must be more significant support for healing for First Nations Peoples, which incorporates ceremony and cultural protocols. The AFN stands in solidarity with residential school Survivors and the families who are seeking justice and healing.

A funding proposal will be submitted to support a national AFN Chiefs' Committee on Indian Residential Institutions for Calls to Action (CTA) 71-76 on Missing Children and Burial Information from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report. This committee would facilitate and advocate for the full implementation of CTA 71-76, monitor its progress, and call on the Government to fully implement the 94 CTAs.

In July 2023, the AFN released a Report Card on the progress towards full TRC implementation. The report card indicates that little to moderate progress (15%) has been made on the 94 Calls to Action. This is concerning as the federal government reports 80% completion. The AFN highlights the need for an independent monitoring mechanism to independently evaluate the completion of the 94 Calls to Action.

Contact:

Sector Director Kyrie Ransom,

kransom@afn.ca