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## Assembly of First Nations

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## Assemblée des Premières Nations

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**SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY**  
December 6,7,8, 2022, Ottawa, ON

**Resolution no. 29/2022**

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**TITLE:** Establishment of an AFN Chiefs Committee on Indian Residential Schools

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**SUBJECT:** Residential Schools

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**MOVED BY:** Kúkpi7 Judy Wilson, Neskonlith Indian Band, BC

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**SECONDED BY:** Chief Roberta Joseph, Trondëk Hwëch'in, YT

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**DECISION** Carried by consensus

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**WHEREAS:**

- A. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) states:
- i. Article 11 (1): Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.
  - ii. Article 12: Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to use and control their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
- B. On May 27, 2021, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc announced that through efforts to learn the truth about the missing children who attended the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, 215 unmarked graves of children were located utilizing ground-penetrating radar.
- C. Additional unmarked graves were later found across Canada at former residential school sites, including Brandon Indian Residential School, Marieval Indian Residential School, Kootenay Indian Residential Schools, St. Joseph's Indian Residential School, Kuper Island Residential School, and to include Indian hospitals and areas that may be found through further investigation
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- D. The information has now come forward regarding the loss of life of children at the schools, disappearances, and instances where there was a failure to document or protect the deceased children, who were deprived of their identity, culture and values, and raising evidence of mass human rights violations of national and international concern.
- E. The Crown's racist, colonial laws and policies towards Indigenous Peoples, many of which continue despite the termination of the Residential School System, were acknowledged in the June 2008 apology issued by former Prime Minister Harper in the House of Commons to survivors of Indian Residential Schools across Canada (the "Apology"). The Apology acknowledged that the objective of the Residential School System was to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions, and cultures and to assimilate them into the dominant settler culture.
- F. The UN Declaration, which the governments of Canada and British Columbia have adopted without qualification and passed into federal and provincial law, affirms the fundamental human rights of Indigenous peoples to practice and revitalize our cultural traditions and customs. This includes, but is not limited to, the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of our culture, such as historical sites, the right to privacy in our religious and cultural sites, as well as the right to the repatriation of the human remains of our people.
- G. Information and evidence on the loss of life must be gathered, protected, and made known to Canada and the world within an appropriate context that does not minimize or deny the magnitude of the wrongs committed.
- H. Churches have sought to minimize their role and withhold their records pertaining to the operation of Indian Residential Schools in an attempt to reduce their financial liability and avoid fulsome engagement with First Nations through impactful investments in reconciliation initiatives.
- I. On April 1, 2022, His Holiness Pope Francis apologized to the Canadian Indigenous Delegation for the role of the Catholic Church and the impact of the horrific abuses and forced assimilation committed against Indigenous children in the Residential School System.
- J. Whereas the RCMP have been involved in the transportation (kidnapping) of the children from their homes to the Residential School System, and they should not be involved as investigators for the crimes committed.
- K. Through AFN resolutions, the First Nations-in-Assembly have cited the numerous horrors of Residential Schools and the need for comprehensive healing supports for survivors, families, and communities.

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- L. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada dedicated a specific volume to the missing children and unmarked graves of Indigenous children who did not return from Canada's Residential Schools and issued several Calls to Action (71-76) to the Federal Government and the churches to identify the locations of these unmarked graves and to identify the missing children.
- M. A Chiefs' Committee on Indian Residential Schools is needed to help share and track information between First Nations who are undertaking ground searches for unmarked graves at former sites of Residential Schools and advocate to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.
- N. Article 7 (3) of the AFN Charter states:
- i. The First Nations-in-Assembly shall, by way of resolution, establish a Chiefs' Committee from time to time that will lead work or take action on a specific subject.
    - a) Chiefs' Committee members shall be appointed by Regional Chiefs following each region's formal rules, policies and procedures for the operation of the regional AFN offices.
    - b) The Chiefs' Committee shall draft a terms of reference at its first meeting to guide the work and forward the terms of reference to the Executive Committee for approval. The terms of reference shall include, at a minimum standard, the authority, accountability, mandate, objectives, composition, reporting structure and timeline for the work by the Chiefs' Committee.
    - c) The National Chief shall be an ex officio member of all Chiefs' Committees and shall assign, in a collaborative process with the Executive Committee, a member of the Executive Committee as the appropriate portfolio holder to act as the Chair of the Chiefs' Committee.
    - d) The portfolio holder shall select a Co-Chair from the members of the Chiefs' Committee, and the Co-Chair shall support the Chair and chair all meetings in the absence of the portfolio holder Chair.
    - e) At no time does a Chiefs' Committee have the authority to pass motions that bind the Executive Committee or First Nations-in-Assembly, but instead, the Chiefs' Committee shall provide recommendations to the Executive Committee and the First Nations-in-Assembly for voting purposes.

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

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**ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD, NATIONAL CHIEF**

1. Establish an Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chiefs Committee on Indian Residential Schools to:
  - a. Help share and track information between First Nations who are undertaking ground searches for unmarked graves at former sites of Residential Schools;
  - b. Advocate to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action; and
  - c. To work with AFN Executive Committee, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments, and the newly appointed Special Interlocutor to address and investigate matters related to the Indian Residential School System.
2. Call on the AFN to ensure the Chiefs' Committee on Indian Residential Schools shall draft their terms of reference, which will include an annual report, ensure that composition of the committee will include participation from residential school survivors and will establish a mechanism for First Nations to share information with the Chiefs' Committee on Indian Residential Schools.
3. Call on the AFN to work with the newly created Chiefs' Committee on Indian Residential Schools to urge the federal government, in full partnership with First Nations, to:
  - a. Call on Canada and Church entities to identify and release records in their control to ensure the records are available to inform the investigations needed at former Residential School sites; and
  - b. Call on Canada and Church entities to provide records to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to ensure that Indian Residential School Survivors, their families and First Nations have full and complete access, including funding the necessary resources to access, review and analyze the records held by Canada, Church entities and any third parties.
4. Call on the AFN to ensure the Chiefs Committee on Indian Residential Schools will work to ensure that the federal government and involved Churches take active steps towards providing consistent and substantive supports to Residential School Survivors, families and First Nations in their efforts of investigation, as well as comprehensive supports for the dynamic and evolving needs of survivors in their journey towards healing from the horrific trauma inflicted by the Residential School System and memorializing the sites where First Nations children were recovered.
5. Direct the AFN to advocate for and seek appropriate resources to engage in or carry out activities to support the Chiefs Committee on Indian Residential Schools in carrying out their mandate.

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