



Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child”. Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as “joint ventures” with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever again prevail. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

June 11, 2008

On behalf of the Government of Canada
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada





Présentation d'excuses aux anciens élèves des pensionnats indiens

Le traitement des enfants dans ces pensionnats est un triste chapitre de notre histoire.

Pendant plus d'un siècle, les pensionnats indiens ont séparé plus de 150 000 enfants autochtones de leurs familles et de leurs communautés. Dans les années 1870, en partie afin de remplir son obligation d'instruire les enfants autochtones, le gouvernement fédéral a commencé à jouer un rôle dans l'établissement et l'administration de ces écoles. Le système des pensionnats indiens avait deux principaux objectifs : isoler les enfants et les soustraire à l'influence de leurs foyers, de leurs familles, de leurs traditions et de leur culture, et les intégrer par l'assimilation dans la culture dominante. Ces objectifs reposaient sur l'hypothèse que les cultures et les croyances spirituelles des Autochtones étaient inférieures. D'ailleurs, certains cherchaient, selon une expression devenue tristement célèbre, « à tuer l'Indien au sein de l'enfant ». Aujourd'hui, nous reconnaissons que cette politique d'assimilation était erronée, qu'elle a fait beaucoup de mal et qu'elle n'a aucune place dans notre pays.

Cent trente-deux écoles financées par le fédéral se trouvaient dans chaque province et territoire, à l'exception de Terre-Neuve, du Nouveau-Brunswick et de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard. La plupart des pensionnats étaient dirigés conjointement avec les Églises anglicane, catholique, presbytérienne ou unie. Le gouvernement du Canada a érigé un système d'éducation dans le cadre duquel de très jeunes enfants ont souvent été arrachés à leurs foyers et, dans bien des cas, emmenés loin de leurs communautés. Bon nombre d'entre eux étaient nourris, vêtus et logés de façon inadéquate. Tous étaient privés des soins et du soutien de leurs parents, de leurs grands-parents et de leurs communautés.

Les langues et les pratiques culturelles des Premières nations, des Inuits et des Métis étaient interdites dans ces écoles. Certains de ces enfants ont connu un sort tragique en pension et d'autres ne sont jamais retournés chez eux.

Le gouvernement reconnaît aujourd'hui que les conséquences de la politique sur les pensionnats indiens ont été très néfastes et que cette politique a causé des dommages durables à la culture, au patrimoine et à la langue autochtones. Bien que certains anciens élèves aient dit avoir vécu une expérience positive dans ces pensionnats, leur histoire est de loin assombrie par les témoignages tragiques sur la négligence, l'abus émotif, physique et sexuel d'enfants sans défense, et ainsi que la séparation de leurs familles et communautés impuissantes.

L'héritage laissé par les pensionnats indiens a contribué à des problèmes sociaux qui persistent dans de nombreuses communautés aujourd'hui.

Il a fallu un courage extraordinaire aux milliers de survivants qui ont parlé publiquement des mauvais traitements qu'ils ont subis. Ce courage témoigne de leur résilience personnelle et de la force de leur culture. Malheureusement, de nombreux anciens élèves ne sont plus des nôtres et sont décédés avant d'avoir reçu des excuses du gouvernement du Canada.

Le gouvernement reconnaît que l'absence d'excuses a nui à la guérison et à la réconciliation. Alors, au nom du gouvernement du Canada et de tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes, je me lève devant vous, dans cette chambre si

vitale à notre existence en tant que pays, pour présenter nos excuses aux peuples autochtones pour le rôle joué par le Canada dans les pensionnats indiens.

Aux quelque 80 000 anciens élèves toujours en vie, ainsi qu'aux membres de leurs familles et à leurs communautés, le gouvernement du Canada admet aujourd'hui qu'il a eu tort d'arracher les enfants à leurs foyers et s'excuse d'avoir agi ainsi. Nous reconnaissons maintenant que nous avons eu tort de séparer les enfants de leur culture et de leurs traditions riches et vivantes, créant ainsi un vide dans tant de vies et de communautés, et nous nous excusons d'avoir agi ainsi. Nous reconnaissons maintenant qu'en séparant les enfants de leurs familles, nous avons réduit la capacité de nombreux anciens élèves à élever adéquatement leurs propres enfants et avons scellé le sort des générations futures, et nous nous excusons d'avoir agi ainsi. Nous reconnaissons maintenant que, beaucoup trop souvent, ces institutions donnaient lieu à des cas de sévices ou de négligence et n'étaient pas contrôlées de manière adéquate, et nous nous excusons de ne pas avoir su vous protéger. Non seulement vous avez subi ces mauvais traitements pendant votre enfance, mais, en tant que parents, vous étiez impuissants à éviter le même sort à vos enfants, et nous le regrettons.

Le fardeau de cette expérience pèse sur vos épaules depuis beaucoup trop

longtemps. Ce fardeau nous revient directement, en tant que gouvernement et en tant que pays. Il n'y a pas de place au Canada pour les attitudes qui ont inspiré le système de pensionnats indiens, pour qu'elles puissent prévaloir à nouveau. Vous tentez de vous remettre de cette épreuve depuis longtemps, et d'une façon très concrète, nous vous rejoignons maintenant dans ce cheminement.

Le gouvernement du Canada présente ses excuses les plus sincères aux peuples autochtones du Canada pour avoir si profondément manqué à son devoir envers eux, et leur demande pardon.

Entrée en vigueur le 19 septembre 2007, la Convention de règlement relative aux pensionnats indiens s'inscrit dans une démarche de guérison, de réconciliation et de règlement des tristes séquelles laissées par les pensionnats indiens. Des années d'efforts de la part des survivants, des communautés et des organisations autochtones ont abouti à une entente qui nous permet de prendre un nouveau départ et d'aller de l'avant en partenariat. La Commission de vérité et de réconciliation est au cœur de la Convention de règlement. La Commission constitue une occasion unique de sensibiliser tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes à la question des pensionnats indiens. Il s'agira d'une étape positive dans l'établissement d'une nouvelle relation entre les peuples autochtones et les autres Canadiens et Canadiennes, une relation basée sur la connaissance de notre histoire commune, sur un respect mutuel et sur le désir de progresser ensemble, avec la conviction renouvelée que des familles fortes, des communautés solides et des cultures et des traditions bien vivantes contribueront à bâtir un Canada fort pour chacun et chacune d'entre nous.

Au nom du gouvernement du Canada
le très honorable Stephen Harper,
premier ministre du Canada

le 11 juin 2008





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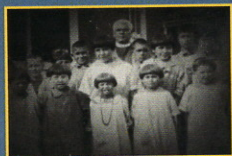
THE DAY OF THE APOLOGY

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JOUR DE LA PRÉSENTATION DES EXCUSES

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Bilingual version DVD / DVD version bilingue :
QS-6238-000-BB-A1
Catalogue: R3-103/2009-DVD
ISBN:978-0-662-06918-8



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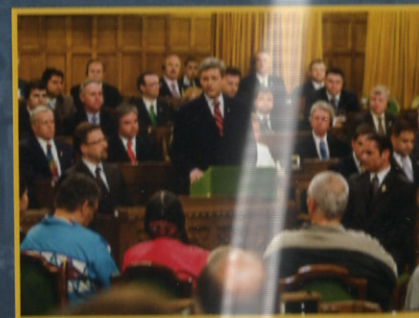
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