

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens
Canada
Manchettes**

Friday, April 13, 2007 ♦ vendredi, 13 avril 2007

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Epoch Times (12 Apr 07) "Native Group Says Churches Holding Children's Bodies: Churches and government say no records of residential school deaths"

By Joan Delaney, Epoch Times Victoria Staff

A group of residential school survivors has begun an effort to have the remains of the children they claim died in the schools repatriated to their traditional homes and territories for a proper burial.

The Friends and Relatives of the Disappeared Residential School Children (FRDRSC) also want the churches that ran the schools to engage in "full disclosure" about the alleged children deaths and who they say may have been responsible. FRDRSC estimates that about 50,000 children died in the schools as a result of disease and abuse.

"Our people have to have a burial; where are those souls?" says Louis Daniels, of FRDRSC. "They're crying out to our people, 'Come and get us.'"

But church officials say there are no records of any children dying in the residential schools, and many Aboriginal leaders dispute the claim of 50,000 deaths.

However, Rev. James Scott of the United Church, which has apologized twice to the aboriginal people for abuses natives suffered under its watch, says that if people have information regarding criminal behaviour, the church "would support them going to the police and seeking criminal reparation."

"The church has a willingness to respond to and seek healing and reparation initiatives with former students, and with families and communities," says Scott. "It's to these people we feel we have an immense moral obligation."

Most of the boarding schools, which operated from 1886 to 1984, were run by the Catholic, Anglican, and United churches, under the auspices of the federal government. The RCMP was mandated by the government to round up all children aged seven and over and deliver them to the schools. It is estimated that between 125,000 and 200,000 children were placed in the boarding schools, which at their peak numbered 88.

Deaths

Daniels maintains many children who died are buried on or near the grounds of the various residential schools. He says he personally knows of three grave sites on a hill east of the Brandon Residential School, which he attended. In many cases, some former students say, the children were the ones who had to dig the graves.

Rev. Kevin Annett, secretary of the Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, an organization that supports the claims, says that while there was a 50 per cent death rate in the years between 1890 and 1920, it was after 1929, when legislation was passed making the churches the legal guardians of the children, that most of the deaths in the residential schools occurred.

Because as legal guardians the churches were unaccountable to the parents or to the state, he says, they were free to perpetrate any injustice upon their charges, one of the aims being to "Christianize" them.

"Every Canadian church, Protestant and Catholic, operated from a racist ideology that believed and practised that all non-Christians were lesser human beings and were ultimately expendable," says Annett.

After he became a minister at the United Church in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island in 1992, Annett began hearing stories from the local aboriginals about deaths and abuse that occurred at the Alberni Residential School, which was run by the United Church from 1895 to 1973. When he began questioning his superiors about the abuses as well as allegations that the Church had sold some native land without permission, he says he was fired from his position as minister.

Annett has since become somewhat of a crusader for former residential school students. In 2005, he published his heavily documented book, *Hidden From History: The Canadian Holocaust*, which gives a

historical account of colonialism and the disastrous effect he says it had—and continues to have—on Canada's indigenous peoples.

The legacy of the schools, says Annett, is "the major reason there's such trauma and problems in the native communities today."

Colonialism

Under colonialism, the residential schools were used to force assimilation of the indigenous people — to take the "Indian out of the Queen's red children," as stated in the Gradual Civilization Act, which implemented the system. But Annett alleges the schools were also used to carry out a policy of "genocide" that began soon after Europeans first set foot in North America.

Diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis, measles, whooping cough, and yellow fever decimated the indigenous peoples of the Americas during early colonialism, and at least some historians believe that the smallpox epidemics, which wiped out millions across the continent, were deliberately spread

Annett says there's evidence that germ warfare was implemented within the residential schools as well, with children being made to sleep and play with their highly contagious counterparts who were infected with TB.

In 1907, Dr. Peter Bryce, head medical officer for the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), wrote a scathing report saying Canada's residential schools were a breeding ground for TB, and that the spread of the disease was being enabled by staff members. He said the "mortality rate among students often exceeds 50 per cent." The Ottawa Citizen ran an article about the report at the time entitled "Schools Aid White Plague."

But Bryce's report fell on deaf ears, and the death rate continued to climb. In 1920, Bryce's boss at DIA, Duncan Campbell Scott, made his infamous statement while proposing a motion to solve what he called "the Indian problem": "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed."

Healing

A settlement agreement announced by the federal government in March will give eligible former students a one-time payment of \$10,000, as well as an additional payment of \$3,000 for each year of residence beyond the first year. The drawback, says Annett, is that those who accept the money have to sign a "gag order" which will prevent them from engaging in any future legal action.

"It's really a big censorship of the whole issue. My concern is this is just going to silence everybody now because if they talk about this stuff they could face recrimination."

Many former students of the residential schools say the apologies and monetary payouts that came from the government and churches following a flood of lawsuits that began in 1996 only applied to former students who had been raped or physically abused. They say crimes of psychological abuse and murder have not been addressed, and that the government and churches have been keeping information about these crimes sealed.

The churches say there are no records of any deaths in the schools, and for the most part their archives are open to the public. Church officials say Annett's allegations are groundless. But Annett says he found such death records at the Koerner Library at the University of British Columbia.

"I have published them in my book, and hence they've been in public circulation since 2001. We regularly send the churches these records."

Valerie Heche, spokesperson for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, the federal government department responsible for negotiating with the natives who attended the schools, also says there are no records of any deaths. Still, the Department of Indian Affairs is willing to "explore this issue in more detail" and meet with representatives from FRDRSC, she says.

In the meantime, Annett and other supporters are set to mark "Aboriginal Holocaust Remembrance Day" on April 15 by holding vigils in seven cities across the country. Their slogan? "No reconciliation without full disclosure."

The Georgia Straight (12 Apr 07) "B.C.'s Children's Champion"

By Rob McMahon

The new representative for children and youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, can examine the deaths of kids in the government's care.

British Columbia's new representative for children and youth enters the office with an impressive set of credentials—and faces an equally formidable number of challenges.

In her career, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond has received a law doctorate from Harvard, a master's from Cambridge University, and degrees from Carleton University and Osgoode Hall, taught law at the university level, practised law privately, and served as Saskatchewan's first Native provincial court judge. Now she is an officer of the B.C. legislature, and she says that at the core of her work will be her belief in adapting law to personal circumstances.

"I've spent a long time considering the issue of recasting law in the context of a pluralistic society, so it meets the needs of people whose stories have been suppressed," she said during a moving-day interview in her new Victoria office. "A situation is always more complicated than what you hear in one case or another."

The child of a Cree father and Scottish mother, Turpel-Lafond moved off her reserve early to pursue an education. Growing up, she experienced domestic violence firsthand. Explaining how she moved beyond this background, Turpel-Lafond pointed to the resilience of families—a quality she documented when she wrote a history of her 2,000-member central Saskatchewan band, the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, for its 2006 centennial.

The book traces the band's history of peaceful coexistence with non-Native neighbours, participation in competitive sports, and voluntary military service during the Second World War. Turpel-Lafond said she wrote the book in part for her four children, aiming to demonstrate how things have changed since their great-grandparents enrolled at the Duck Lake reserve school.

"It's a lot different from the issues that people hear of in the media, where First Nations are living in jails, addicted to substances, and have lost their culture," she said. "The history shows the strengths of families, and how they help people persevere."

Turpel-Lafond explained how she's benefited from the guidance of her community's elders, who, she said, teach balance in life, kindness, respect, and generosity. She pointed out that those principles are a significant part of the legal tradition of Canada and that they underline the importance of caring for children.

"You would be very hard-pressed to find an elder who didn't work to prepare a good path for the future of the children," she said.

One forward-looking elder is 85-year-old Lavina White, a member of the Haida Nation. White, who was interviewed by Ted Hughes during the research for his April 2006 report on child welfare in B.C. (which led to the establishment of Turpel-Lafond's position), is the author of *Liberating Our Children: Liberating Our*

Nations, a book used to inform the drafting of the Child, Family and Community Service Act. White said Turpel-Lafond faces challenges, especially as a newcomer to the province.

"I'm worried more children might be lost, because it takes time to learn what's what and who's who," she said during a phone interview. "The nations within the province are just like those in Europe....They all have different ways of doing things, especially with childcare."

At face value, statistics relating to B.C.'s Native children and youth tell a bleak story. Though they make up eight percent of the province's youth population, aboriginal youth currently represent 43 percent of youth in custody—approximately 5,000 individuals—and a third of those who have received a community sentence. One in seven school-aged Native children has been in government care, compared to fewer than one in 50 non-Native children. These children often face poor health and limited education and employment opportunities, and only one-fifth of them graduate from high school.

At a March 15 First Nations Summit meeting, Turpel-Lafond spoke to approximately 80 delegates and a similarly sized audience in the Chief Joe Mathias Centre in North Vancouver. She told of her commitment to working directly with the Native community and how she hopes to open offices on reserves and hire First Nations staff members.

"I feel we [my husband and I] have been fairly close to First Nations communities all our lives," she said. "Every child counts, every life is sacred, in every community....I hope to influence the culture of B.C. to ensure children are valued and First Nations children in particular are respected."

She noted that she understands how families and kinship ties in Native communities are structured, how when a child is injured, it affects not only the immediate family but also the extended family and the community as a whole.

Native lawyer Kelly MacDonald—who has an extensive background in child-protection issues, and worked in the office of Turpel-Lafond's predecessor, child and youth officer Jane Morley—told the *Straight* that building a connection to these communities will be a challenge for the new representative.

"The history of the child-welfare system and residential-school system...[has resulted] in historical distrust of government agencies," MacDonald said. "One challenge is being able to gain that level of trust on the ground and in communities."

For example, she said, the regional organization of child-care services is not embraced by everyone in the Native community; some Native directors of delegated child-care agencies are "not keen" on that style of administration and feel they were not included in the decision-making. MacDonald also noted the challenge of working with the province's diverse groups.

"In B.C., there are a number of different cultural groups and political alliances within the First Nations community," MacDonald said. "To complicate things further, there's a large urban population and M'Étis population. She [Turpel-Lafond] needs to ensure that all these disparate groups are working together."

At the First Nations Summit meeting, delegates raised concerns about the representative's relationship to government policy and processes, the danger of a "Pan-Indian" approach, and funding issues. However, in general, the mood among delegates was supportive. Reached by phone after the presentation, the summit's Grand Chief Ed John praised Turpel-Lafond's commitment to culturally appropriate solutions.

"She made it clear to chiefs that she would meet with them in their communities," he said. "With more than half of children in care [being Native], that was welcome news to hear."

John said such meetings are a good first step—and that the 203 Native communities in B.C. should develop 203 separate plans. In a news release, the summit stated that her mix of "outstanding qualifications" and "deep understanding of the aboriginal community" makes Turpel-Lafond an excellent choice.

"From the First Nations perspective, [it's] important to recognize the authority of families and communities over their children," John said. "Solutions need to start at [the level of] the community and the family....Changes don't happen at the cabinet table or in a board office downtown—they happen within each and every family."

The process leading to Turpel-Lafond's appointment began with the independent review of B.C.'s child-protection system conducted by former judge Hughes starting in November 2005. Hughes's report highlighted a range of poor outcomes for children in care, noting high rates of illness, injury, and death, slow academic progress, and high rates of incarceration.

MacDonald, along with elders Kathy Louis and White, was invited to comment on the Hughes report from an aboriginal perspective. Released on June 4, 2006, her comments praised Hughes's efforts to consult the public and reach out to the aboriginal community.

MacDonald said any vision for governance of the aboriginal child-welfare system requires proper engagement with the Native community, including consideration of implications that policies may have for Native self-government. She noted the importance of recruiting and retaining aboriginal staff and conducting reviews of deaths of children in care.

On May 18, 2006, the government passed the Representative for Children and Youth Act, which allows the representative to act as an advocate on behalf of children and youth, monitor and audit designated services for children and youth, and conduct independent reviews and investigations of the deaths and critical injuries of children receiving reviewable services.

In the lead-up to the act, the provincial government's child and youth transition team invited interested parties to comment on the proposed act. First Call, a coalition of provincial, regional, and local organizations as well as hundreds of individuals, answered the call to comment. Reached by phone, First Call provincial coordinator Adrienne Montani said that at first there was some cynicism in the child-welfare community because the call came during the summer and the deadline was in September. However, she said she believes interested parties put forward their comments in time.

First Call recommended a number of amendments to the act, among them inclusion of the School Act and Employment and Assistance Act under the definition of "designated services" and an explicit mandate allowing the representative to support the right of children to be consulted and heard in matters affecting them. Montani said that after meeting Turpel-Lafond on March 14, she's sure of her commitment to both individual and systemic advocacy, children's rights, and the development of an integrated plan that considers services across the lifespan of children.

"It was music to our ears, because she was speaking about advocacy in a way that was really good to hear," Montani said. "She will be very accessible to children and youth and their families."

Since arriving at her new office, Turpel-Lafond has argued that in order to be successful in B.C., federal funding levels and processes must be reformed.

She also criticized the current funding process at the First Nations Summit meeting. She said that funding based on numbers of children in care is a "perverse performance measure" that discourages preventive measures—akin to jails receiving funding for the number of prisoners they hold.

"In an era when the number of children that are apprehended has declined for nonaboriginal communities, in aboriginal communities it goes up," she told the standing committee. "With the Kelowna Accord being scrapped, the issue of investment in aboriginal children's futures is a question mark with respect to British Columbia."

Rocky Mountain Outlook (11 Apr 07) "Stoney schools work to preserve language"

By Rob Alexanader

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries, Canada was home to at least 60 aboriginal languages, but in the roughly 400 years following colonization, the majority of Canada's aboriginal languages are now either at risk or on the verge of disappearing.

Currently, Canada's aboriginal languages are among the most endangered languages in the world, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In the past century alone, 10 once-thriving languages have vanished with another dozen, such as Haida with 240 speakers, and Kutenai at 120, at risk.

In fact, only three of Canada's 50 still-surviving aboriginal languages – Inuktitut, Cree and Ojibway – are expected to survive into the future as each has more than 20,000 speakers.

On the Stoney-Nakoda First Nation reserve, the challenge is keeping the language alive when the number of people in the Stoney-Nakoda First Nation, while growing, is still relatively small at roughly 4,000.

Add to that the predominance of English in this region and in the media; music, movies, television and magazines, and it is a mix that Kim Fox, one of three language teachers at Morley, believes could lead to the demise of the Nakoda language in the next 50 to 70 years.

The 2002 Indian and Northern Affairs report *From Generation to Generation: Survival and Maintenance of Canada's Aboriginal Languages Within Families, Communities and Cities* indicates that one of the major threats to any aboriginal language is the off-reserve environment.

"Our language survived residential schools, but I feel that will change in 50 years," Fox said recently.

Fox added that at Morley, roughly a third of the 600 students are fluent, one-third are able to understand it, but can't speak it and one-third cannot understand or speak Nakoda at all. She added that most elementary students speak in English to one another, rather than Stoney.

"They all play in English. When I was a kid I played in Stoney," she said.

A member of the Siouian Family of languages that are part of the Greater Sioux Nation, Nakoda has been spoken in the Rocky Mountains since at least the late 1600s when the Mountain Stoneys arrived in this region, following a roughly 50-year, 4,800 kilometre journey that began in the Great Lakes Region.

French and British explorers and fur traders began to introduce their trade goods, culture and languages in the Rocky Mountain region in the mid- to late-1700s.

Following that period, especially after the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877 and the introduction of residential schools, the Nakoda language — like numerous aboriginal languages and cultures — came under considerable pressure from mainstream society.

But today, Nakoda is a living language still being taught to children in their homes and, of course, championed in the schools by people such as Fox, Helmer Twoyoungman, her counterpart at the Eden

Valley school and Dr. Gordon Breen, Morley school principal. The Big Horn School, on the Big Horn reserve located near Nordegg, also teaches Stoney as part of the regular curriculum.

Originally an oral language, Stoney-Nakoda became a written language in the 1970s. The three schools offer classes in Stoney, beginning with the youngest students through to senior high, which offers Stoney 15, 25 and 35, each worth three credits.

The younger grades work with simple concepts such as animals, numbers and common prayers, for example. High school students take an hour a day, which Fox said helps with their retention.

But teaching the language is only part of the equation — like anything, it has to be relevant.

As a result, the Morley school includes a strong cultural component in its curriculum, of which Nakoda is an integral element, that Breen said attempts to “honour and facilitate cultural aspirations.

“Our intention is – our programming is to reinforce the aboriginal identity

(Nakoda) – identify and create a solid foundation of personal and academic growth. We see the native culture as an asset to the student’s education or schooling,” he said.

Without helping students develop their identity as aboriginal people, the school will have failed, Breen said, as aboriginal schools across Canada failed their charges by not embracing the unique identity of each group.

“For years, Aboriginal schools were part of the reason for the failures: it worked against or negated the students’ identity. If they get through the school, many graduate without refinement of their identity as individuals,” he said.

“You don’t run against who your community is. A portion is dictated, but another portion is what the community wants.”

At the same time, the school has to reach the goals Alberta Learning has for all schools across the province to allow graduates get jobs and go on to university or college.

The Nakoda cultural component has its own classroom where students learn about their own culture, their history, even nature, all in their own their language, making the school a richer, more meaningful experience for students and educators alike.

Twoyoungman likens the work that happens in this classroom to balancing a drumstick – essentially the idea of promoting harmony through understanding.

“Say you have understood your culture, and are more accepting of others,” he said, adding balancing a drumstick allows Nakoda people to function in the white world.

“It’s the only way you can live in harmony.”

Preserving their language is also a celebration of their culture and an affirmation that they are survivors and that they are not, as once believed, mere charges of the government, but instead, in control of their future and their identity.

“That’s the other thing we have to focus on; the positive. Why it’s important. Why it is important to preserve our language,” Fox said.

Fox said to help facilitate the preservation of Nakoda, she hopes one day a language centre will be built on the reserve, a building solely dedicated to preserving and teaching their language.