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Students at a residential school are seen in a classroom in this undated file photo.

PM to deliver apology to residential school victims

Updated Wed. Jun. 11 2008 7:42 AM ET

CTV.ca News Staff

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will make a formal apology in the House of Commons Wednesday to all aboriginals who suffered abuse in native residential schools.

Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl has vowed Harper will deliver a speech that takes responsibility for the abuse many aboriginal children suffered

at the hands of those running the mandatory schools, which operated for a century, ending in the 1970s.

About 150,000 native children went through the programs, which were an extension of religious missionary work designed to assimilate the children into Christian society.

"It is significant because it's important every time the Crown, or the Canadian government, or provinces recognize that colonialism has affected aboriginal people in a very negative way," Robert Lovelace, retired Chief of the Ardoch Algonquins, told CTV's Canada AM on Wednesday.

Still, Lovelace said the Tories have been dragging their feet on so many other issues relating to aboriginals in Canada.

"They hire hundreds of lawyers and academics to undermine aboriginal claims and aboriginal rights," he said from Ardoch, Ont.

"I worry about this (the apology) as like a retirement party, where people are recognized and the truth is spoken but it's the end of the line for considering anymore ideas around, or compensation for, (victims of) residential schooling."

On Tuesday, Harper fended off criticism for failing to give aboriginal leaders the chance to respond on the House of Commons floor after Wednesday's apology.

Manitoba Liberal MP Tina Keeper, a member of Norway House Cree Nation, led off question period by asking why aboriginal leaders have not been invited.

Harper responded by accusing Keeper of detracting from the importance of the event with her comments.

"I would urge all parties not to play politics with this (and) simply get behind a sincere apology," he said.

Strahl told reporters on Monday that Harper would deliver a lengthy apology that acknowledges the numerous types of abuse that took place at the schools, including elimination of native languages and culture. He said the speech would clearly explain why the government is remorseful.

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Manitoba Liberal MP Tina Keeper asks the traditional first question reserved for the Opposition leader during question period in Ottawa on Tuesday June 10, 2008. (Tom Hanson / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

VIDEO

Canada AM: Robert Lovelace, retired chief

CTV Edmonton: Sonia Sunger on the expectations

Mike Duffy Live: Michael Cachagee, a residential school survivor explains why the apology matters

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CTV Newsnet will have a live broadcast of the apology, expected around 3 p.m. ET

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Rocket

It's about time. How many governments have come and gone, and how many politicians have paid this lip service yet have done nothing. This is a mark of shame on the history of our country and while Stephen Harper will finally address this and issue a long-overdue apology, I can't help but feel it's too late for it to have the impact it needs. All previous governments, Liberal or Conservative, should be ashamed for keeping their heads in the sand.

wc

Long overdue and appropriate. What was done in those places was shameful.

Michele

Will the Catholic church be apologizing too?

Judi Halfe-Phillips

I don't believe there will be any sincerity behind this apology. Unfortunately, the general public may not realize the devastation Residential Schools have caused. The damage is irreparable and the root of the problems many natives have faced over the years. My mother was in a Residential School, so I know what she went through and more.

MHR

Apology is nice but it is not enough. Punish those who are responsible even if they are still 90 year old. Just like we did with Nazis - we still punish whoever are still alive today.

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