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# Phil Fontaine responds to the government apology on residential schools

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Chris Wattie/Reuters

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine waits in the foyer of the House of Commons. Fontaine and other native leaders were on hand to witness Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologize for ...

**Prime Minister, Chief Justice, members of the House, elders, survivors, Canadians, for our parents, our grandparents, great grandparents, indeed for all of the generations which have preceded us, this day testifies to nothing less than the achievement of the impossible.**

**This morning our elders held a condolence ceremony for those who never heard an apology, never received compensation, yet courageously fought assimilation so that we could witness this day.**

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Together we remember and honour them for it was they who suffered the most as they witnessed generation after generation of their children taken from their families' love and guidance.

For the generations that will follow us, we bear witness today in this House that our survival as First Nations peoples in this land is affirmed forever.

Therefore, the significance of this day is not just about what has been but, equally important, what is to come.

Never again will this House consider us the Indian problem just for being who we are.

We heard the Government of Canada take full responsibility for this dreadful chapter in our shared history.

We heard the prime minister declare that this will never happen again. Finally, we heard Canada say it is sorry.

Brave survivors, through the telling of their painful stories, have stripped white supremacy of its authority and legitimacy.

The irresistibility of speaking truth to power is real. Today is not the result of a political game. Instead, it is something that shows the righteousness and importance of our struggle. We know we have many difficult issues to handle.

There are many fights still to be fought. What happened today signifies a new dawn in the relationship between us and the rest of Canada. We are and always have been an indispensable part of the Canadian identity.

Our peoples, our history and our present being are the essence of Canada. The attempts to erase our identities hurt us deeply but it also hurt all Canadians and impoverished the character of this nation.

We must not falter in our duty now. Emboldened by this spectacle of history, it is possible to end our racial nightmare together. The memories of residential schools sometimes cut like merciless knives at our souls.

This day will help us to put that pain behind us.

But it signifies something even more important: a respectful and, therefore, liberating relationship between us and the rest of Canada. Together we can achieve the greatness our country deserves. The apology today is founded upon, more than anything else, the recognition that we all own our own lives and destinies, the only true foundation for a society where peoples can flourish.

We must now capture a new spirit and vision to meet the challenges of the future. As a great statesman once said, we are all part of one "garment of destiny". The differences between us are not blood or colour and "the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us".

The "common road of hope" will bring us to reconciliation more than any words, laws or legal claims ever could. We still have to struggle, but now we are in this together.

I reach out to all Canadians today in this spirit of reconciliation.

Meegwetch.

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