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JUNE 13, 2008

Québec Native Women's Association responds to Harper's apology for residential schools



The [Québec Native Women's Association](#) has called upon the Canadian government to acknowledge that residential schools were an act of genocide.

Statement by Quebec Native Women's Association/Femmes Autochtones du Québec

Re : Government of Canada's Residential School Apology June 11, 2008, Kahnawake

Quebec Native Women recognizes the Prime Minister's official apology concerning the genocidal experience of Aboriginal people in the history of the Residential School system. While the apology to Aboriginal peoples is long overdue it is contradicted by the oppressive policies of the Indian Act.

The heinous crimes committed against Aboriginal children who were victims and survivors of the Residential School experience must be dealt with beyond mere apologies and monetary compensation.

The damages to our languages, well-being, social and political structures, and sexuality caused by Residential School, demands attention. The policy of assimilation through the Residential Schools system constituted a war against an identifiable group of people.

And while we commend the Canadian Government on the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission we cannot ignore the Auditor General's recent report substantiating that budgets for child welfare agencies in Canada continue to focus the majority of their efforts on the placement of Aboriginal children outside their communities and Nations. This type of practice is reminiscent of the Residential School policy.

Consequently, the Canadian Government must acknowledge that Residential School was an act of genocide; a crime against humanity. Apologies may be recognized but they are not necessarily accompanied by forgiveness as no nation or groups have ever been forgiven for their acts of genocide.

In order for this apology to be considered genuine, more efforts must be undertaken to correct current oppressive measures under the Indian Act that prevent Indigenous peoples from prospering socially, culturally, politically and economically.

The actions of the Canadian Government in opposing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples makes the apology feel hollow. Their opposition to the UNDRIP perpetuates the insidious, archaic Indian Act that continues to discriminate and deny Aboriginal nations their rights. The facts and arguments reflecting the manner in which the Canadian Government continues to undermine the rights of Indigenous peoples, can be found in Amnesty International's 2008 Annual Report.

We therefore urge the Government of Canada to adequately fund Indigenous languages in a manner that is equivalent to the support given to the French and English languages; to adequately consult Aboriginal peoples in good faith on legislation that addresses issues such as matrimonial real property, Bill C-21, Bill C-47; Bill C-30 and to eliminate the sexual discrimination that exists

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under Section 6 of the Indian Act.

In order for Aboriginal communities to emerge from the negative impacts of colonization they must have access to their lands and resources; they must have the opportunities to build strong and healthy nations by taking to task the social and economic problems whose roots are firmly based in colonization.

Canada has established itself as a rich and prosperous country at the expense and blood of Aboriginal peoples. And while we may recognize the Government's admission of guilt, the fact remains that many obstacles must be removed in order to give meaning to the spirit and intent of their apology.

- Ellen Gabriel, President, Québec Native Women's Association

[Anna Carastathis's blog](#)

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