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Canadian apology to original inhabitants for century of abuse

May 30th, 2008 - 11:35 am ICT by admin - [Email This Post](#)

By Gurmukh Singh

Toronto, May 30 (IANS) Atoning for the most disgraceful chapter in its history, Canada will formally apologise next month to its original inhabitants - known as native Indians - for abuses against their children in so-called residential schools. For over a century between 1870 and 1970, over 150,000 native Indian children were taken away from their families and put in church-run residential schools.

These government-funded schools were ostensibly set up to educate them. But their hidden motive was to Christianise and assimilate them in the European population.

But the treatment they got in these schools has become a big blot on Canada's reputation.

Uprooted from their families and put in an alien environment, these children were subjected to all sorts of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. They were called dogs and subjected to physical torture if they spoke their native languages.

Subjected to inhuman treatment, many took to drugs and alcohol. Thousands never went back to their parents. Half of them were estimated to have succumbed to deadly diseases contracted in unhygienic school conditions.

Leaders of the native Indian community and historians have called it genocide.

In the wake of lawsuits, the Canadian government has agreed to pay \$1.6 billion to over 90,000 survivors and set up a truth and reconciliation commission.

The commission begins its five-year work next month as Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally submits the historical apology in the Canadian parliament June 11.

Living mostly in reserve areas, native Indians - also known as First Nations - number about one million in a population of 33 million in this country.

Though the Canadian government spends billions of dollars on them annually, they fare very badly on human development indices. Early-age deaths, suicides and alcoholism are common.

Canada follows Australia, which apologised in February to its aboriginal people for a similar treatment of their so-called "stolen generations".

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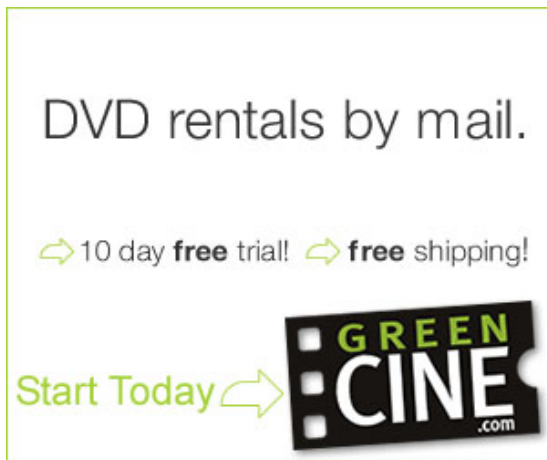
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