

Grand chief wants apology from Queen

(CP)

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WINNIPEG—The head of 30 of the most remote northern reserves in Canada says since the prime minister won't apologize to aboriginal people for the abuses they suffered in residential schools, the Queen should.

Northern Manitoba Grand Chief Sydney Garrioch has sent a letter to the monarch explaining how native children were forcibly removed from their parents and sent to schools for years at a time—often seeing family for only holidays and summers.

"I would humbly implore you, as our Head of State and the Queen of the British Commonwealth, to ensure our cries of the former residential school students are heard, issue an apology on behalf of your government in Canada, and let us close this terrible chapter in Canadian history," pleads the six-paragraph letter.

Typed on official letterhead from the Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin, the letter is addressed simply to: Her Majesty The Queen, Buckingham Palace, London, SW1A 1AA.

Exactly a week ago, Australia made a formal apology to aboriginal people for generations of wrongs, including its residential schools.

Canadian aboriginal leaders reacted by repeating their calls for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to offer a similar gesture. Australia's apology was beamed around the world and it underscored a feeling that an apology in Canada is long overdue, Garrioch said.

As recently as last June, Harper's Conservative government signalled it might reverse a generally held federal policy of "no apology, no compensation" to aggrieved ethnic groups, but so far there's been no change.

Garrioch's letter also suggests that only a royal representative of government is able to apologize in a way that Canadian aboriginal people can accept.

Garrioch saves the final lines to remind Her Majesty of the special relationship between aboriginal people and royalty in treaties to settle Canada.

"Our nations agreed in 1871 with your great, great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, to enter into a treaty relationship in which she promised that her 'Indian' children would be protected and bear her benevolence 'for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows.'

"I hope you will honour that legacy and join me in the healing journey of our people with an official apology," the chief's final words say.