



2021

ACIFA STATEMENT ON THE DISCOVERY OF 215 BODIES AT THE SITE OF THE KAMLOOPS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

The *Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association* (ACIFA) expresses its deepest sorrow at the recent discovery of the bodies of 215 children at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

This discovery confirms the accounts of many survivors of Residential Schools who have long insisted that the number of students who died in such institutions has been underreported. Since 2009, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) has asked various levels of government for support in investigating suspected mass burial sites at Indian Residential Schools across Canada, but unfortunately, those calls have gone unheeded. The fact that this discovery was the result of the sole efforts of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation to finance the use of sonar technology to validate their community's stories of missing children in 2021 represents a black mark on all of Canadian society.

In 2015, the TRC released its findings, and concluded that the Government of Canada engaged in the cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples through the creation of an Indian Residential School System that sought to "kill the Indian in the Child." Such schools had the added impact of weaponizing the child welfare system against Indigenous Peoples through the now-infamous "sixties scoop," the result of which has traumatized successive generations of Indigenous families and communities.

In addition, in 2019 the final report of the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (MMIWG) went one step further, and concluded that the ongoing (and disproportionate) rates of violence and disappearance encountered by women, girls, and gender minorities who identify as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) constitutes genocide perpetuated by the Canadian state.

While the 215 bodies uncovered at the Kamloops Indian Residential School have once again thrust Canada's brutal colonial legacy into the national spotlight, it is important to recognize that Canada is not a "post-colonial" society. The disproportionate number of Indigenous children that continue to be apprehended by child welfare authorities in Canada (particularly in the Prairie Provinces), the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's prison system, and the continued existence of third-world conditions on many reserve communities in Canada (some of which have been without clean drinking water for years) indicates that there remains much work to do before one can say that Canada has "reconciled" with the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

ACIFA understands that while it is not directly responsible for the colonial violence perpetuated onto Indigenous Peoples and communities, it has the responsibility to acknowledge the history of genocide that has occurred on the lands it operates on, lands commonly referred to today as Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territory. All people who have lived in Canada in the past and do so today are implicated in this reality.

As such, while conversations on colonialism and genocide in Canada are bound to be uncomfortable, these are conversations that we all have a responsibility to participate in. As Union leaders, we must recognize that many of the people we work with and teach have been directly touched by these unfathomable acts



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of horror, and as Educators, we have a responsibility for doing what we can to learn these painful lessons and do our part to build a more just and equitable world.

As a result, AICFA recognizes that it has the responsibility to support further efforts at reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and thus adds its voice to the growing chorus calling for all levels of government to fund the investigation of suspected mass graves at other sites of former Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

Respectfully Submitted (and in Solidarity),
ACIFA Executive Council and Presidents'