

June 1, 2021

OSSTF/FEESO was deeply saddened by the horrific discovery of the remains of 215 children buried at a former residential school on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory in Kamloops, British Columbia. This is one more example of the pain and suffering caused by the atrocities associated with residential schools inflicted upon First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples, and highlights the destructive effects of colonization that continues to harm Indigenous peoples. This discovery is more than just a piece of history, it is a grim reminder of the continued trauma faced by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Getting to the truth is hard and clearly incomplete, but getting to reconciliation will be impossible if we do not demand action from all levels of government and each other in accordance with the 94 Calls to Action recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Upon learning of the horrible news OSSTF/FEESO President Harvey Bischof said, "When we learn of the deaths of children we are always saddened, but when we know they were at the hands of the very educators and adults who should have protected them, and when we know these deaths to be part of a greater systemic genocide of a people, then we must be appalled." He added, "But our sadness and anger must also act as forces that allow us to make change, and to embrace true reconciliation."

Ontario was home to at least seventeen residential schools. The legacy of pain and suffering committed at these institutions did not end when they closed. These schools existed for over 100 years and Friday's discovery will likely not be the last. It further exemplifies the attempt to cover up evidence of Canada's attempt to eliminate Indigenous peoples. We must continue to listen and respect the Survivors of the system who found the strength and courage to bring their experiences to light.

We stand with residential school Survivors and all Indigenous people in the name of reconciliation. We are committed to ensuring all students learn about the history of residential schools as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission but we are also determined to embrace the need to acknowledge and challenge all forms of marginalization and oppression that continue to cause harm in our communities. To mourn is simply not enough; we must take action and we must put in place all the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

As educators, we must come together to support the children in our schools as they come to terms with the ever-unfolding history of the residential school system and to address the devastating impacts of the endless tragedies on Indigenous families, communities on Turtle Island. However, we must also respect that some communities will not speak out as part of traditional protocols and be mindful of the fact that this news can renew the pain, trauma, and grief within Indigenous communities.

OSSTF/FEESO calls on the Federal government to take immediate actions in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation:

- An extensive and exhaustive investigation of all former residential school grounds across Canada;
- The implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and
- The withdrawal of the federal government's appeal of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling ordering Ottawa to pay billions of dollars in compensation to First Nations children and their families separated by a chronically underfunded child-welfare system.

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