



# Statement

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**June 21, 2021**  
**For Immediate Release**

## **National Indigenous Peoples Day**

Commemorating National Indigenous Peoples Day on these lands is an opportunity to celebrate the diverse cultures and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from sea to sea to sea.

This year, many among us are enveloped by raw feelings of shock and sadness as we learn of the recent discovery by the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc Band of at least 215 children buried in unmarked graves near the former Kamloops Residential School. The findings in Kamloops have elicited deep emotions of grief, sadness, anger and compassion and have resulted in makeshift memorials across Canada.

But this discovery is not surprising or unexpected to Indigenous people, who have lived and known the appalling reality that children died in these schools and did not return home. The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report described the government-led policy of removing children from their families and placing them in residential schools far from home as “cultural genocide.”

Yet, despite the abhorrent treatment of Indigenous people on these lands, we see nothing but a strength of spirit flowing from First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Urban Indigenous people, who continue to express resistance, resilience and ceremony in profound ways, showing us the way forward.

Today is a time to remember what happened and to celebrate survival, strength and endurance. It is also critical to reflect on our own positions and how we can each contribute to the dismantling of colonization which continues to cause harm and arguably, impoverishes all of us in diverse ways. This means educating ourselves on Indigenous cultures and history, understanding the impact of colonialism, acknowledging and calling out the overt and systemic racism we see and hear across Canada, eradicating racist policies and practices in our social institutions and supporting the implementation of all 94 of the TRC's Calls to Action.

I want to believe that we have reached a threshold moment – a no turning back moment. Many of those who had not fully understood – or did not know – what happened to Indigenous people in this country are expressing an interest in learning more and in taking action to be part of true reconciliation. Despite all the previous efforts to bring to light the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and colonialist policies, photos of 215 small pairs of shoes have had a visceral impact for many: now that we know better, we must do better.

The effects of residential schools and other colonialist policies are not old history – it is harm we see every day in the work of my Office. We know that a direct line exists from residential schools to contemporary child welfare issues, as highlighted in a report I released earlier this month, *Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging*, which illustrates just how critical it is for children in government care to feel connected to family, culture and community, and how a colonial system has resulted in so much disconnection for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous people.

While we honour and hold space for a full spectrum of feelings from outrage to sadness at recent events and discoveries, I join Indigenous leaders in calling for a thorough investigation of all 130 former residential school sites to find any unmarked graves, and for the release of records held by churches, governments and other entities.

Today, amid the calls for change and amid the tears, be a changemaker. Learn, reflect, embrace, inquire and act. Each of us has a role to play.

Above all else, we must not lose sight of all that Indigenous peoples have brought to these lands since time immemorial and their vision for a better future for their children, families and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jennifer Charlesworth  
Representative for Children and Youth