

June 14th, 2021

Cree Nation Response to Indian Residential Schools

Speaking Notes Chief Daisy House

Our community of Chisasibi has been hit particularly hard by the news from Kamloops of the 215 children, as a community with 2 former sites of Indian Residential Schools the news revived terrible memories, fears and traumas. The knowledge that the remains of children will be found on grounds in our community, children that were taken from distant homes, is almost too much to bear. The community has a solemn obligation to these children, their families and their people. Despite the already heavy burden on the people of Chisasibi we intend to take actions to secure the sites in a manner that is respectful of this solemn obligation.

We have an opportunity as a community with two former Indian Residential School Sites to show other communities, that we share their pain, we cherish their children, and we care for the spirit of their community. It is our hope to reach out to the families and communities of all students that passed through the doors of the Indian Residential Schools at Fort George and will we need the assistance of all government organizations and Churches that have any records to help ensure that we are as inclusive as possible. Moving forward will not only be the challenge of securing and documenting the past but will involve the difficult challenge of commemorating these sites in a way that does not further cause victimization or unnecessary pain but captures the love and compassion that we feel for all children who attended residential schools, the love and compassion that we feel for their families and communities.

There is something very important that we must communicate to the rest of Quebec and Canada. Although there have been attempts to address the impacts of Indian Residential Schools in the past through individual compensation measures or formal apologies there is an important component which we have yet to address. Community.

We are a people who from birth and through ceremonies such as the walking out ceremony where a child's first steps are celebrated through recognition of the place this child takes in the fabric that binds our people, the land and wildlife together. This deep spiritual connection is nurtured and celebrated throughout our lifetime. Children and youth to this day make up the most significant segment of our communities. When you take one of our children, when you torture that child in an attempt to kill their spirit or when you take a child away forever, you do profound damage to the soul of our community. The damage goes far beyond the damage that is done to an individual Indian Residential School Student and it never goes away.

What do I say to a grandmother who to this day gets upset when we disturb the footprints of a child because during the most painful time in her life, all she could do was preserve the footprints

of her children as long as she could, because is this all she would have of them 11 months of every year?

Here in Chisasibi we have brave and courageous community members that have formed groups to console and assist the former students and community members that struggle with the terrible legacy of Indian Residential Schools. These groups are supported and guided by Elders' that hold and fulfill sacred roles in our communities. It is these groups that will lead the management of the former sites of Indian Residential Schools in our community. The potential to cause great harm by not respecting the role of these groups is very high. The administration and leadership of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi will be there to support them and we will ensure that fellow administrations such as the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay and the Eenou Eeyou Police Force also fulfill this same obligation.

I would like to personally thank all people, officials and organizations that have offered support and assistance during these very trying times. For those of you that only now begin to realize the depths of the horrors that our communities have lived and ask what you can do: do not forget us, or our children.

You honour us and them by never forgetting and showing understanding and patience whenever you interact with us. Your prayers and compassion are felt and appreciated.

As an indigenous author about residential schools once said "Stories have played, and will continue to play, a role in educating Canadians, young and old, about the terrible legacy of residential schools. There is no excuse not to know the history or its impact."

To conclude, I will share comments I heard recently while watching a group of women talking and one of them said, "When you know better, you do better and we all know knowledge evolves, therefore we need to interrogate our history and ask is that right? So we need to be bolder and better."

Therefore, we, as individuals, as a family, as an entity, as the Cree Nation and particularly the Quebec and Canadian governments will all need work for the betterment of our people and especially for the health and wellbeing of our future generations.

Thank you. Watchiyaakw misiwah. May the creator bless you all.