



MEDIA RELEASE
January 27, 2022

Syilx Okanagan Nation Stands in Solidarity with the T'exelcenc as 93 Grave Sites are Located at the old St. Joseph's Mission Residential School Site

tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation stands in solidarity with the T'exelcenc (people of Williams Lake First Nation) as preliminary results from geophysical investigations have identified 93 "reflections" of potential human burials, at the site of the former St. Joseph's Mission Indian Residential School near Williams Lake, BC. We are sending prayers to all peoples who are being impacted by these tragic findings, alongside all Tribal Nation's that continues to be re-traumatized by Indian Residential Schools. All these spirits deserve the space to be honored, grieved and properly cared for.

"The church and Canada need to be criminally investigated and charged for killing First Nation children at Federal Indian Residential Schools," Chief Clarence Louie, ONA Tribal Chair stated. To date no person or institution have been charged in these egregious crimes.

"Over 7,000 unmarked graves have been recovered across Turtle Island in the last year. As these numbers continue to grow, we cannot make them just numbers — each child was a prisoner of war. This intentional cultural genocide was and is to kill the Indian in the child, to remove Indigenous people from each other, their spirit and the lands that the settlers covet. We also recognize that the continued recovery of unmarked graves is traumatizing for many Nation members and First Nations peoples in general. As these truths continue to be unearthed we encourage all Nation members to unite and continue supporting the survivors and each other through the emotional impacts of the recent findings," Louie added.

"I truly believe that these heart wrenching atrocities were criminal acts, carried out on those children who never made it home and to our strong Indian Residential school survivors who are still with us. These criminal acts need to be treated as such. Apologies and empty words from the Prime Minister, government officials or a trip to the Vatican will never heal the pain and hurt that our people were subjected to, were witness to and continue to endure. I truly believe a proper investigation needs to be carried out and those who were responsible or complicit in need to be held accountable", Chief Greg Gabriel also stated.

Allan Louis, Syilx Health Governance Representative also added that, "In this moment of heartbreaking news we stand with all the communities that are waiting for their children to come home so the healing can continue."

For Syilx Okanagan Nation members who attended St. Joseph's and want to share their stories as part of the formal investigation, please reach out to the investigation team at sjmission@wfn.ca.

~

The Syilx Indian Residential School (SIRS) Committee is a group of highly dedicated, intergenerational Syilx Indian Residential School survivors. The SIRS Committee is invaluable in providing direction to the Nation on numerous projects regarding the Indian Residential Schools. This Committee, represented by the seven member communities, has expressed that they feel a sense of belonging and healing from participating on this Committee. They have a true ownership role in ensuring projects move forward, taking into account their knowledge and experience. For more information on the Syilx Indian Residential School experience visit: www.syilx.org/wellness/indian-residential-school/

*The Indian Residential School Survivors Society has a 24/7 emergency crisis: 1-800-721-0066. **KU-US Crisis Line Society** also provides a 24-hour provincial Indigenous crisis line: Adults call 250-723-4050; children and youth call 250-723-2040; or toll-free 1-800-588-8717.*

For further information please contact:

Chief Clarence Louie, ONA Tribal Chair
T: 250-498-9132

Jennifer Lewis, ONA Wellness Manager
T: 250-826-7844
E: wellness.manager@syilx.org