



The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

June 23, 2021

RE: Justice and accountability for First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and Indigenous peoples in Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We are writing on behalf of the 600,000 supporters of Amnesty International Canada to appeal to you for greater and prompter action, justice, and accountability for Indigenous children, and indeed all Métis, Inuit, and First Nations peoples in Canada.

On May 27, the remains of 215 Indigenous children were found on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Kamloops, BC. These children should never have been taken from their families.

Residential schools were part of a colonial policy to eradicate Indigenous cultures, languages, and communities. While the last school closed in 1996, intergenerational trauma, ongoing harms and discriminatory practices against Indigenous Peoples continue to this day.

Because of discriminatory colonial policies, Métis, Inuit, and First Nations children continue to be disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. First Nations children living on reserve receive less money for healthcare and education than other children in Canada. Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people experience staggeringly high rates of violence. Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people too often experience racism when accessing or interacting with public services like policing and healthcare. Government frequently approves industrial projects on Indigenous territories without free, prior, and informed consent or recognition of Indigenous laws and scientific knowledge.

The reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2019, plus numerous reviews by the United Nations and other international human rights bodies, have documented the extent of the harms against Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and made innumerable recommendations to Canada to ensure justice and accountability for Indigenous Peoples.

We are heartened to see that Bill C-15 to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has received royal assent, and we welcomed the increased funding to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people.

However despite clear recommendations for change and some commitments to action, Canada continues to fall short of real justice and accountability.

Your government continues to litigate against First Nations children living on reserve, denying them the same levels of funding for basic services as other children in Canada. Your government is still fighting residential school and day school survivors in court. Your government continues to resist calls from Indigenous Peoples to respect their right to self-determination and apply the principle of free, prior, and informed consent regarding industrial development on their territories.

To ensure justice and accountability—not only for the 215 children whose bodies were buried at the Kamloops Indian Residential School—but for all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, your government must do more, and without delay. Canada is responsible for creating and enacting colonial laws and policies, and Canada must bear responsibility for addressing the ongoing intergenerational harms associated with these laws and policies.

Prime Minister, we have heard your acknowledgement of past and ongoing human rights violations against Indigenous peoples. We have heard your commitments to action. We also continue to see too little action being taken to address systemic racism against Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children in Kamloops has brought people in Canada together in their grief and in their demand for change. Action can be delayed no longer.

We call on you to act with great urgency and:

- Fully implement the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and share a public timeline for implementation;
- Fully implement the 213 calls for justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls;
- Immediately stop litigation of First Nations children and comply with the 2020 Canada Human Rights Tribunal ruling on funding of child welfare service and Jordan's principle of eligibility;
- Implement the calls in the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada's Spirit Bear Plan;
- Fully cooperate with international investigations into human rights abuses experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada;
- Implement UN recommendations to halt resource development projects that do not have the free, prior, and informed consent of affected communities;
- Fully fund mental health and other services to support Indigenous peoples in dealing with traumas caused by colonial policies and practices, in accordance with their wishes;
- Where requested by affected communities, fully fund examinations of burial grounds at other former residential and day schools and ensure that Indigenous peoples control access to sites according to their own laws and customs;
- Investigate and prosecute perpetrators responsible for the deaths of Indigenous children at residential schools;

- Appoint a high-level representative to lead investigations into the deaths of Indigenous children at residential schools and create a legal framework to protect burial sites;
- Continue urging the Catholic Church to release all records and photos related to residential schools, and again seek an apology and reparations for survivors and their families.

We would like to request a joint meeting to further discuss our concerns with the ongoing injustices experienced by Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples in Canada and the steps your government is prepared to make to adhere to international human rights standards.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ketty Nivyabandi
Secretary General
Amnesty International Canada
knivyabandi@amnesty.ca



France-Isabelle Langlois
Directrice générale
Amnistie Internationale Canada francophone
filanglois@amnistie.ca

CC: Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services
Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Women and Gender Equality
Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health