



STATEMENT ON INDIGENOUS CHILD GRAVES IN CANADA

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The Iraq Project for Genocide Prevention mourns the discovery of the remains of hundreds of indigenous students identified the past month at former residential education facilities for indigenous children in Canada. *These discoveries further confirm the genocide facilitated by the American and Canadian governments against these populations.* The presence of unacknowledged mass graves of children across the settler colonial societies of North America underscores that boarding schools were part of a larger genocidal process that is not adequately captured by the term “cultural genocide.”

The site of the Kamloops school, the grounds where the first group of bodies were found, is only one example of many such facilities that were in operation beginning in the late 19th century and primarily run by religious institutions. According to the New York Times, there may be as many as 30,000 missing indigenous children in similar graves across Canada. *The IPG therefore calls for an immediate commitment to official investigations of boarding school grounds in the U.S. and Canada* if there is ever to be a hope of comprehending the full degree of damage inflicted upon the indigenous communities of these lands by these countries’ governments.

Indigenous children were forced to attend these schools, even though this often meant taking them away from their family and communities. Many children were kidnapped by state authorities. The students were forbidden from speaking Indigenous languages or practicing Indigenous cultural practices; such prohibitions are characteristic of genocide. Torture, abuse, and sexualized violence were rampant.

The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, sponsored by the Canadian government, found in 2015 that the system was indeed a “form of cultural genocide”. The commission called for an apology by the Vatican for the part played by the Roman Catholic Church in these institutions. While acknowledging the suffering caused, Pope Francis has not gone as far as to issue a formal apology, despite former students’ testimony that priests had fathered infants with some of the indigenous students, according to New York Times reporting.

We join the Commission in urging Pope Francis to recognize and answer for the role the Church had in carrying out and perpetuating this genocide against the Indigenous people during this period. This acknowledgement may lend itself to a healing process for those who lived through such experiences and will help to legitimize their feelings surrounding it. It would also set the stage for restorative justice processes that center indigenous voices.

The Iraq Project for Genocide Prevention further calls on Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as well as US President Joe Biden, to call for formal investigations into the matter on their own soil. While the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative announced this past week by U.S. Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, is a good first step in this direction, we ask the Biden administration to support this initiative by making available all necessary resources of the federal government, and by calling for an expansion of this initiative to encompass a full truth and reconciliation process in the United States. The evidence coming to light requires investigation and therefore merits creation of a new commission to formally investigate what happened and what additional crimes were committed against the Indigenous people, in both the United States as well as Canada.

Only in recognizing the wrongs that were committed in the past, can any group, government, or society, hope for a better future. Genocide, regardless of form, must be addressed as early and consistently as possible in order to ensure that violent genocidal structures are dismantled. This instance of genocide is no exception.