

SERPENT RIVER FIRST NATION

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June 29th, 2021

Media Release on Canada Day; Truth and Reconciliation

Aanii Council and Community; Elders and Youth and Neighbours

I'd like to take a few moments to honour the children found across Canada by their First Nations and ask that their Spirits go home, rest and find peace. These may not be the last of the reclaimed children, but we wish to love and share compassion with all communities at this time.

I don't say we discovered because these children weren't lost or misplaced, but purposefully hidden, but now their truth will be heard. From 2008 - 2015, we told our stories, shared our pain and shone a light on what the Institutions known as Residential Schools had done to our communities. Indigenous peoples launched the Truth and Reconciliation, but Canadians ignored it. Volume 4 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is over 270 pages and contains a volume of information about Missing Children and Burials. The truth was written down, but it was ignored. It gives clear direction on what is needed to address the issue, and it flagged that the number of children is unknown. Unknown.

Canadians ask; What can we do? Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is the path forward for YOU, as Canadians and inheritors of this legacy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission did the work for you; it created a path for ALL Canadians to find a way to get over this Mountain. It gave you the answers, the horror and the stories to do something, but you never read it. You never listened to us back then, and now our children are making you listen. Their voices told through our spirits and Elders weren't heeded, and now they will be heard. Truth. Truth is needed before Reconciliation. Canada is afraid of the Truth.

Every citizen at this moment has a choice: one that will affect you, your family and your children. You know where to find the truth of Canada's past. History will ask you; you knew, but what did you do? Are you going to answer? I didn't personally do it. It was so long ago, or will you accept that the treatment of Indigenous Peoples, the apartheid reserve System, the forced indoctrination of children; the sterilizations; the kidnappings and the missing and murdered women and girls, as what they are; massive and dark stains on the very Soul of this country, that will never go away.

We are here because of what's happened to us: the good, the bad. The Anishinabek of the Serpent River is still here, despite what's been done. I am here because my Grandparents

survived. I want every Canadian to realize that every single Indigenous person they may know, maybe a survivor, the children of survivors or their children. They may be all 3 of those.

I want to end today's message with a thought on Canada Day; we see the conversations around cancelling, not cancelling. It's custom in Anishinbek communities and Serpent River; to cancel events out of respect. Canada has been given thousands of reasons to mourn. However, instead, the backlash for just asking to reflect and cancel BBQs and Fireworks has been shocking. Many of the messages we've seen are aggressive and demeaning; it's a constant reminder that we are not wanted in your communities. We are not valued or respected as human beings. Many well-meaning Canadians will take every opportunity to share their racist stereotypes, problematic tropes, and more. We are tired of performing our trauma for you to learn and do better.

So, as Indigenous peoples all across this land, call out and ask for a pause. We are simply asking that you evaluate what you are proud of. What are you celebrating? Is it something you are proud of? Or is this a celebration of Power and Privilege? What message does this send to the Indigenous peoples in your lives?

I'm not asking for you to cancel your special day, but I am asking that you reflect and truly understand the past, how we got here, and whose land you are standing on.

We are here. We are not going away, and we must learn to live with each other.

Chi-Miigwetch

Chief Brent Bissaillon
Serpent River First Nation