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## SAGAMOK, SERPENT RIVER & MISSISSAUGA CHIEFS MEET IN CEREMONY TO DISCUSS SHARED APPROACHES TO INVESTIGATING CHILD RECOVERY AT SPANISH RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

**[SPANISH, ON June 28, 2021]** On the former grounds of the Spanish Residential Schools, Gimaa Alan Ozawanimke of Sagamok Anishnawbek, Gimaa Brent Bissaillion of Serpent River First Nation and Gimaa Reg Niganobe of Mississauga First Nation came together to discuss a shared approach to investigating the former Residential School site for unmarked graves.

The meeting comes a month after the first reports of 215 mass unmarked graves of students being found at the former Kamloops Residential School in the territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in the southern B.C. The report precipitated investigations at other Indian Residential Schools sites across the country yielding more reports of children who never made it home to their families.

Around a sacred fire, in a teepee on the grounds of the former Residential School overlooking the mouth of the Spanish River, the Chiefs met in prayer and pipe ceremony with the support and guidance of their ancestors and the spirits of the children who still walk the grounds to discuss how they might bring their communities together to address the unfinished business at the former school sites.

It is fitting that we are here today," says Gimaa Alann Ozawanimke "at a spot where our waters touch, coming together; this is a place of shared responsibility over our lands and waters, and the site of the former Residential School where many of our children from past generations attended and lived."

Ceremony brought the Gimaas together to "shine up" the Relationship Accord the 3 First Nations had signed back in November 2016 by sitting down around a fire to confirm each First Nation's shared interest and concern for the potential of recovering the remains of former students of the Spanish school.

"After generations of having the experiences of our families denied," says Gimaa Brent Bissaillion, "the truth has now been forced upon Canada and it's clear that our children cannot be ignored any longer".

The Gimaas reflected on what they are hearing and feeling from members of their own communities, sharing stories of sacred fires being lit and walks from the former Residential School back to the sacred fires in their home communities.

"We are here around the sacred fire to listen. We listen to the children here and to our ancestors," says Gimaa Reg Niganobe. "Whatever happens here is part of our story, all of our stories, and it's truth that has to be said."

The Gimaas also reflected on how the news coming out of former Indian Residential School has changed and will continue to change the narrative of what "reconciliation" means in Canada.



Gimaas Reg Niganobe (Mississauga First Nation), Gimaa Alan Ozawanimke (Sagamok Anishnawbek) and Gimaa Brent Bissaillion (Serpent River First Nation) emerge from ceremony and talks on the evening of June 28 on the grounds of the former Residential School in Spanish, ON (Left-Right)



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Gimaa Alan Ozawanimke says that indigenous people can be expected to move forward with their teachings as they deal with their grief and do what needs to be done to recover all indigenous children who may have perished in Residential School settings — recorded and unrecorded— and help them journey home. He says those teachings are now more important than ever and that he hopes these will shape the new model of “reconciliation” that will come from the new reality.

He says that the news forces everyone to be more honest. He says that indigenous people will express themselves using their teachings of zaagi'idizwin (love), Minaadendaamowin (respect), Aakode-ewin (bravery), debaadendiziwin (humility), Debwewin (truth), gwayakwaadiziwin (honesty) and nibwaakaain (wisdom).

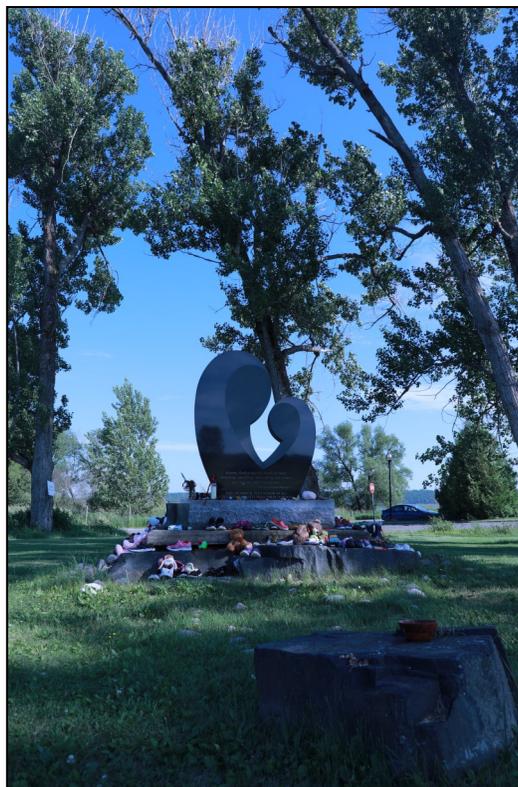
He says that being brave will be important for both indigenous people and Canadians: for indigenous people to be brave when speaking their truths and for Canadians to be brave when hearing those truths.

The Gimaas discussed ways of coming to their communities to seek guidance, support and assistance in what needs to be done and how to do it.

They also noted that part of their attention will have to go towards considering the legacy of the Spanish school of enrolling students from numerous First Nation communities across the Great Lakes region of Ontario and Quebec: if any children are found in unmarked graves, they may be from either Sagamok, Serpent River or Mississauga First Nation, or they may be from one of many other First Nation communities. They too will require care and a path to journey home.

Gimaa Ozawanimke says that Sagamok Anishnawbek has already committed to the purchase of ground-penetrating radar apparatus to be employed in the site investigation.

The 3 Gimaas came out of ceremony to share a feast of fish and resolved to go back to their communities start determining on their own ends what should be done to lay to rest one of the lingering legacies of a federal schools system that has labelled an instance of cultural genocide perpetrated by the Canadian state against indigenous peoples. They know the path for them will require ceremony every step of the way.



A monument with children’s shoes, candles and photos on the grounds of the former Spanish Residential School

**Gichi-apiitendaagoziwag akina abinojiiying**  
**"Every Child Matters"**

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*Built on the foundation of Mino-Biimaadiziwn (Living a Good Life), enriched by our culture, and empowered by the voices of past, present and future generations, Sagamok Anishnawbek will be at the forefront of leadership and self-sufficiency among First Nations.*

*The Leadership of the Mississauga Nation are advocates of growth focused on the protection and promotion of our rights to achieve a sustainable future grounded in Anishnaabe Values.*

*Serpent River First Nation will use all available financial, human, natural, technological and cultural resources to achieve self-sufficiency through the efforts of all Community Members. Our strong and unique cultural and spiritual identity will drive us to ensure a healthy community that is safe and secure for all generations*