

The time for apologies is over: Action on reconciliation for Canada's Indigenous peoples is needed now

By Kyle Seebach, MP Dufferin-Caledon

OPINION

Our country is grieving following the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation's devastating discovery of a mass grave with the remains of 215 children at a former residential school outside Kamloops, B.C.

This national tragedy has brought unimaginable heartbreak for First Nations communities across Canada and for all Canadians. It's also a terrifying reminder of a dark chapter in Canada's history with the residential school system and the need for immediate, meaningful action on reconciliation.

While communities and families grapple with this unthinkable revelation, we must come together to provide whatever assistance is necessary to aid in the healing process, including the resources needed to protect, honour, and identify the children of this tragedy. The legacy of the residential schools is a national shame and has had a profoundly lasting and damaging impact on Indigenous culture, heritage, and language. Words and apologies are not enough for the survivors of residential schools and for the families who've lost loved ones. We must take meaningful and immediate action now to address this horrific chapter of our Canadian history.

In 2008, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a historic apology to former Residential School students, their families, and communities for Canada's role in the operation of the schools and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the TRC). The TRC recognized that the Indian residential school system had a profoundly lasting and damaging impact on Indigenous culture, heritage, and language. Sadly, little has been done to implement the 94 calls to action in the TRC since it was released six years ago.

This unspeakable discovery of the mass grave demonstrates much more needs to be done to address the outstanding recommendations in the Report and must be done quickly to ensure we can focus on the necessary work of tackling the issues to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples across Canada.

The Conservative Party has put forth a list of meaningful actions that can assist families and Indigenous communities during this time:

developing a comprehensive plan to implement TRC Calls to Action 71 through 76 by July 1, 2021;

funding the investigation at all former residential schools in Canada where unmarked graves may exist, including the site where 215 children have already been discovered;

ensuring that proper resources are allocated for communities to reinter, commemorate, and honour any individuals discovered through the investigation, according to the wishes of their next of kin; and

developing a detailed and thorough set of resources to educate Canadians of all ages on the tragic history of residential schools in Canada.

We are calling on Canada's Parliament to share in our commitment to reconciliation and for the Trudeau government to take immediate action to address this national tragedy to support Indigenous communities, and our country, in mourning.

Meaningful action must be taken now by the government, and all Canadians, to heal the gaping wounds for Canada's Indigenous peoples. You can support this essential process by contacting the Prime Minister at PM@pm.gc.ca and urge him to promptly act on the outstanding recommendations in the TRC. We must come together to not only acknowledge this dark part of Canada's history,

but also learn from it to ensure it never happens again.