



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC welcomes federal supports for healing and for addressing the legacy of Indian Residential Schools

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – Today, Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett, Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller, Justice Minister David Lametti, and Canadian Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault announced an additional \$321 million in new funding targeted at addressing the legacy of the Indian Residential School System (IRS). The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) issues this statement to acknowledge this new support aimed at healing and addressing the genocidal intent of the federal IRS policies.

“The AMC welcomes these new commitments from the federal ministers to the First Nations within our Treaty and traditional territories to respond to and heal from the genocidal intent and ongoing impacts of the Indian Residential School policies,” stated Grand Chief Arlen Dumas. “The AMC was not advised ahead of time of this funding by the federal and elected officials who were in Treaty One territory last week as part of the Treaty One commemoration events; however, First Nations in Manitoba will access and utilize this funding as one measure for reparations for the past sins of the federal government and the churches who were, and continue to be, complacent in the crimes committed against First Nations.”

As announced the new funding is intended to cover a range of eligible expenditures and initiatives:

- This funding adds \$83 million to the previously promised \$33.8 million aimed at addressing TRC calls to action 72-76
- Spending an additional \$107.3 million this year on measures to assist First Nations with healing from intergenerational trauma
- Budgeting \$20 million to establish a national monument to honour IRS survivors, former students, and the many thousands who died and whose remains continue to be uncovered in unmarked graves; and
- Plans to appoint a ‘special Interlocutor’ who will identify and recommend new legal measures or federal reforms related to the ongoing discoveries of unmarked and undocumented graves and burial sites at the former residential schools.

“This funding and proposed measures are commendable and one small step towards federal and church accountability,” continued Grand Chief Dumas, “however, how can program dollars and one time expenditures account for the genocidal policies of the past. These indefensible and genocidal policies were designed by former Prime Minister Sir John A. McDonald and enforced by extreme assimilationists such as former Indian Affairs Minister Duncan Campbell Scott, to forcibly remove First Nations children from their families as part of the greater objective of extinguishing aboriginal title, denying inherent First Nations’ rights to self-determination, and gaining unfettered settler access to First Nations’ lands, waters and resources. As McDonald said in defence of removing First Nations children to residential schools:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write.

Grand Chief Arlen Dumas added, “so it is difficult for the AMC member First Nations to reconcile the IRS policies, which remain on the books within the *Indian Act* to this day and which were enforced up until 1996 when the last residential school closed, with the need to move forward in the spirit of truth and reconciliation with this current federal government. The funding and associated initiatives are needed, but fall far short of advancing reconciliation in a meaningful way for First Nations.”

“We continue to reiterate that what is needed,” said Grand Chief Dumas, “are real reforms that fulfill the spirit and intent of our solemn agreements, recognize First Nations’ legal traditions, recognize First Nations as the original collective title holders of these lands, recognize this title has not been extinguished, and that acknowledge that First Nations are not simply ‘Indigenous communities’ as we are continually referred to as by settler governments. Referring to us in these paternalistic ways is not reconciliation. There must be more accelerated efforts and more nation-to-nation discussions, perhaps at a First Ministers Conference or with AMC Chiefs-In-Assembly, on many of these issues, including constitutional reform, reconciling the Crown’s assumed sovereignty - and the racist doctrines on which it is based - with First Nations inherent rights, and on giving more meaning to the full box of rights contained in Section 35 of Constitution Act, 1982.”

Grand Chief Dumas concluded, “if these more substantive measures and discussions can be held with the AMC Chiefs-In-Assembly, then perhaps First Nations, Canada and the churches can make meaningful progress in reconciliation, full accountability, and in providing real compensation and adequate reparations for the federal and church roles in the genocidal intent of McDonald, the IRS policies and the crimes committed against First Nations.”

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Inineu (Cree), Anishininew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.