



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC Response to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) issues this statement in response to the apology issued via a written statement to First Nations by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) on September 24. After many years of denial, the CCCB finally apologized to the First Nations peoples of these lands for its role in the Indian Residential Schools and for the crimes its members perpetrated against First Nations children as part of the government's policy for the establishment and running of Canada's infamously racist and genocidal Indian Residential Schools (IRS). On September 27, the Canadian bishops also pledged \$30 million over 5 years for the former IRS students and their representative organizations, to assist with healing, with improving communities and with improving the lives of the former IRS students.

In addition to responding to the Canadian bishops, the AMC will be coordinating, or involved in, many activities this week to commemorate Orange Shirt Day and the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It will be looking forward to ongoing correspondence with the Archdiocese of Winnipeg on further supports for the former students.

Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, “I am hesitant, as I am sure many others would feel, to fully accept the apology of the bishops on behalf of my family. As we seek justice and start a week of healing, and as we commemorate the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation in this country, I have too many unresolved feelings over past atrocities and ongoing IRS horrors to entertain any overtures or to fully accept any type of apology from the Catholic Church at this time. Perhaps if the apology was made in person by the bishops to the former students, then it may be more meaningful and be more sincere. As many others impacted by the legacy of the IRS would likely agree, I feel an in-person apology would help First Nations with achieving a lasting justice rather than a written statement delivered through the media.”

Grand Chief Dumas added, “However, we must consider the commitments made by the CCCB in the apology and the potential support for the former students through the announced funding. The announced funding could build some trust and could have positive implications for a lasting justice for the former IRS students and their family members. It is significant that the bishops have committed to sharing records and documents in their possession that may help to identify former IRS students buried in unmarked graves. These records will be important for the families and for providing a final dignity to those who did not make it home from these institutes. It is also important the CCCB will work to secure an apology from Pope Francis to former students to take place on their lands in what is now Canada. The AMC supports the delegation going to the Vatican this December to initiate Pope Francis’ apology.”

“Although we are conflicted by the bishops’ apology, the AMC acknowledges the CCCB for expressing profound remorse and for ‘unequivocally’ apologizing for its role in running the residential schools. This is one small step on the long journey the Church must embark on for reparations to First Nations. So, it is good that the CCCB will make funding available for the former students and embark on further fund-raising efforts in each of the regions to support initiatives as discerned by First Nations. The AMC will look forward to an invitation from the CCCB to assist with initiatives in Manitoba region,” concluded Grand Chief Dumas.

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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 / Ininew (Cree), Anishininew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.