

The Honourable Bernard Valcourt, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
The House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

July 11, 2014

Dear Minister Valcourt:

With our ecumenical partners, we have followed the challenging debate and negotiations surrounding the *First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act*, Bill C-33. We recognize in Bill C-33 a desire to address issues around Indigenous education. At the same time, we observe a troubling absence of trust between First Nations and the Government of Canada. We urge you to acknowledge the need for building trust and to pursue it with diligence and creativity in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

The funding announcements associated with Bill C-33 were a milestone – they serve as a clear and public acknowledgement that Indigenous education has been underfunded and that justice is required. The promise of \$1.9 billion and the 4.5% escalator were a good first step towards addressing the pressing and unique needs of Indigenous students. We are thankful for this mark on the path of reconciliation and look forward to its implementation. Furthermore, we acknowledge the title of Bill C-33, *The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act*, as a symbolic step away from deeply rooted patterns associated with the legacy of colonialism and assimilation. Deepening commitment to the holistic principles of Indigenous control of Indigenous education by Canada and Canadians, is essential for the truth of this symbol to be realized. The integrity of words and symbols are built on tangible action towards justice.

It is our understanding that in the midst of current tensions, work on Bill C-33 has stopped and no new funding has been released. Yet, there remains a huge gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in per capita funding for education. We urge you to take bold steps in making additional funding available for Indigenous education immediately. Such action would be a hopeful sign.

The history of Indian Residential Schools, along with insights from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), highlight how easily one culture can fail to respect another with devastating consequences. In order to build trust with Indigenous peoples, a new process for justice and equity in Indigenous education is needed. This will require patient dialogue and resolute action that respect the diversity and unique needs of Indigenous communities and learners. As the TRC concludes its mandate, we move into an important era of continued healing, new understanding and the reversal of historic wrongs. Education was at the heart of these errors; education will be an essential element of healing and reconciliation, and the forging of better relations with the First Peoples of this great land.

We offer our prayers for the work of justice, reconciliation and equity in Indigenous education.
And we pray for blessing and wisdom for you as you offer leadership on behalf of the
Government of Canada.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the letters 'Fred' in a cursive script.

The Most Rev. Fred J. Hiltz
Primate
Anglican Church of Canada

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name 'Susan C. Johnson' in a cursive script.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name 'Mark MacDonald' in a cursive script.

The Rt. Rev. Mark MacDonald
National Indigenous Anglican Bishop
Anglican Church of Canada

cc. Jean Crowder, NDP

Carolyn Bennett, Liberal

Peter Dinsdale, Chief Executive Officer, Assembly of First Nations

Terry Audla, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami