



Canadian Ecumenical
Justice Initiatives /
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L'Église unie du Canada
Le fonds du primat pour le secours
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June 2, 2008

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

RE: Government of Canada's Formal Apology for Indian Residential Schools

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives unites eleven national churches and church organizations in faithful work for social justice and human rights. KAIROS member churches represent millions of Canadians in thousands of communities.

For decades, the churches that form KAIROS have worked with Indigenous peoples in Canada to honour nation-to-nation relationships that promote, protect and implement the human rights of Indigenous peoples, including the right to self-determination.

KAIROS is encouraged that the long-awaited apology to the former students of residential schools, and their families, will take place in the House of Commons on June 11.

However, the terms of the Indian Residential School Agreement include the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the process of preparing the apology. We are concerned to learn that Indigenous peoples have not been involved in either drafting the apology or planning the event.

A sincere and meaningful apology is essential if it is to contribute to the ongoing process of healing between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. This will not be possible if Indigenous peoples are excluded, since a key component of a meaningful apology must be the involvement of the victims at all stages. As well as acknowledging past injustices, and the responsibility for them, a genuine apology must include a meaningful process of reconciliation. The government's approach to the human rights of Indigenous peoples, including its actions on residential schools, makes it difficult to conclude that the government is committed to a transparent, inclusive and meaningful process.

Unless the apology is clear about the government's commitment to changing the way it deals with Indigenous peoples and their human rights, it will not be taken seriously by Indigenous peoples or their supporters, nor will it contribute to a new partnership based on mutual respect and recognition of rights and responsibilities.

We urge you to act immediately to seek the input of the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, survivor organizations and other Indigenous peoples and groups in order to ensure that the apology is conducive to genuine reconciliation and healing.

Sincerely,

Janet Sigurdson
Co-Chair
KAIROS Indigenous Rights Committee

Harold Roscher
Co-Chair
KAIROS Indigenous Rights Committee

cc: Phil Fontaine, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations
Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Beverly Jacobs, President, Native Women's Association of Canada
Clement Chartier, President, Metis National Council
Patrick Brazeau, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
Hon. Chuck Strahl, Minister, Indian and Northern Affairs
Hon. Stéphane Dion, Liberal leader
Hon. Jack Layton, NDP Leader
Gilles Duceppe, Bloc Quebecois leader
Hon. Anita Neville, Liberal Indian Affairs critic
Marc Lemay, Bloc Indian Affairs critic
Jean Crowder, NDP Indian Affairs critic