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APOLOGIES FROM THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE HARM CAUSED BY RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

DECLARATION OF THE AFNQL CHIEF

June 11 2008

Today, the prime Minister of Canada presented his apologies to the survivors of residential schools, for the abuses they suffered. These abuses are a known fact and it certainly deserves apologies from the Canadian government.

More than 15 000 persons of the First Nations of Quebec went through this tragic period; they were dragged away from their family, as early as 7 years of age, then taken to a residential school, where they had to live ten months a year. The clear and admitted objective was to assimilate the young natives to the Canadian society. The method was categorical and cruel. The physical punishments were frequent and at times, reached unacceptable proportions. Many even lost their lives there.

Very quickly, the authorities of residential schools succeeded to instill in these children a feeling of shame for having been born from a First Nation, for being what they are. Their parents also developed a feeling of shame and disarray.

The residential schools left major scars. Its devastating effects are perceptible in many communities.

The victims of the residential schools are not only those who lived there. Many persons suffered and are still suffering, even if they never attended these places. Pain, hatred, anger and lack of understanding are transmitted from one generation to the other.

Is there a need to remind that the residential schools are part of a comprehensive strategy of assimilation, whose master piece is the *Indian Act*, a law which is still in force today? The values behind the system of residential schools are very much present today in the actions of the Canadian government who has been trying all this time, to control all the angles of our way of life, from birth to death, not to mention the education aspect.

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador are wondering how the prime minister can apologize for the scandal of residential schools, while totally ignoring the crisis situations which prevail at this very moment, and which result from the same policy having justified the creation of residential schools.

How is it possible to justify, for example, the chronic under-funding of First Nations education, the key to the future of our youth? How is it possible to justify the under-funding of our social services? How is it possible to ignore the large number of children who are placed away from their community, because there is no prevention service within the communities? Our communities are suffering major problems, which have a direct link with the scandal of residential schools. Yet, the government is not providing the resources required to counter the crisis situation. It still refuses to grant our communities the sums comparable to those of the rest of the population. While Canada ranks 4th on the Human Development Index, our First Nations are at the 68th rank.

Is the prime minister also apologizing for this situation?

Most of all, today, we invite the Canadian government to act concretely.

If the government does not adopt concrete measures, especially towards our youths, its apologies will prove meaningless.