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Dene National Chief Yakeleya Responds to the Passing of Bill C-5

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Yellowknife, Northwest Territories – June 07, 2021] – Following the discovery of 215 Indigenous children’s remains in unmarked graves at a former residential school in British Columbia by the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation, both houses of Parliament fast-tracked the passage of Bill C-5, marking September 30th as the annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, this past Friday.

“As the Assembly of First Nations Portfolio Holder for Residential Schools, the swift passage of Bill C-5 leaves me with many mixed emotions. While I am ultimately grateful for the non-partisanship displayed with MPs unanimously agreeing to wrap debate on the Bill, I am reminded that this outcome is something I have repeatedly pressed the federal government for. At a time of such deep mourning for our communities, I can’t help but feel it’s now become a band-aid solution,” said National Chief Yakeleya. “This should have already been a fast-tracked priority for this government in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action... This government who ran its election campaign on promises of a new relationship based on respect, partnership, and a recognition of rights. A new relationship that no longer perpetuates the colonial attitudes and abuse that were designed to destroy our cultures, traditions, and spirits. We should not have to find the remains of our children whom we have been telling you have been buried for decades, just to spark a fire in this ‘new relationship’”.

In 2017, a similar Bill was introduced by the NDP and foundered in the Senate two years later. Despite this roadblock, last week Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller said this legislation marks a step toward righting past wrongs associated with the residential school system, which he deemed a "national tragedy borne by colonialism and propelled by systematic racism."

“Let me be clear that these public national acknowledgements do matter. They matter for the survivors. They matter for our communities. They matter for the generations who have lost their traditions because their bloodlines were disrupted,” continued Yakeleya. “But let us not forget that immediate action *also* matters. Our Elders have told us where we can find our lost children. We need to bring them home for their families and their spirits. Let our survivors and Elders lead us on this path. Let us embrace their souls in ceremony and return them to the spirit world amongst our ancestors. Just like we’ve spoken on the importance of a national holiday to bring awareness to the horrors of Canada’s dark past, we’ve spoken on the lost souls, as well. Now is the time for Canada to listen. Our voices have been heard, and we won’t stop reminding those responsible until every soul returns home.” concluded Yakeleya.

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