Dene National / Assembly of First Nations
Office (NWT)

5120- 49th Street
P.O. Box 2338
Yellowknife, NT, X1A 2P7

Phone: (867) 873-4081
Fax: (867) 920-2254
Toll Free: 1-866-511-4081

Website: www.denenation.ca

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 23, 2025

DENE NATIONAL CHIEF CALLS FOR RESPECT AND JUSTICE IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL INVESTIGATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[MAY 23, 2025, DENINU K'UE, DENENDEH]– The Dene National Chief has issued a strong statement in response to the ongoing issues surrounding the investigation into the deaths of children at St. Joseph's Residential School and the treatment of their remains. The Chief emphasizes the need for respect, justice, and equality for Indigenous governments in these sensitive matters.

Chief Louis Balsillie of the Deninu K'ue First Nation has expressed deep concern over the handling of the investigation, stating, "This is an investigation, not a research project, and this is a cemetery, not an archaeological site. The children buried there are not artifacts." The Chief's remarks highlight the need for a respectful approach that honors the memory of the children and the wishes of their families.

The Dene National Chief calls attention to the mandate of Minister Caitlan Cleveland, who is responsible for collaborating with Indigenous governments to advance reconciliation and uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Chief asserts that the Minister is in breach of her mandate by not honoring the wishes of the Deninu K'ue First Nation and their extended families.

Chief Balsillie questions the equality before the law for Indigenous governments, stating, "Where is the equality before the law for our Indigenous governments? Just because we don't have reserves doesn't mean that we shouldn't make the final decision about the investigation into these children's deaths and the treatment of their remains."

Richard Edjericon, MLA for Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh, supports this stance, questioning the differential treatment of Indigenous burials compared to non-Indigenous ones. He asks,

“Would a non-First Nation person agree to an Archaeology Department issuing an Archaeological Permit for research into the death of their sibling; or, would that family member demand that the death of the loved one buried in a community cemetery be investigated by the Coroner’s Office?”

The Dene National Chief George Mackenzie states, “ It is of great importance and cultural respect that the Coroner’s Office ensure the process of investigating questionable deaths, as the cause of death for many children is often listed as tuberculosis, a categorization that is disputed by survivors and archival records.

The Dene Nation demands the GNWT to respect the jurisdiction of Indigenous governments and enforce obligations directed to the Coroner’s Office to complete these investigations, ensuring that the children who died while attending residential schools are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.”

Signed,

George Mackenzie,
Dene National Chief/Regional Chief, Assembly of First Nations - NT

-30-

For more information, please contact:
Leanne Goose, Communications and Community Engagement
Mobile: 587-986-6215 | Email: communications@denenation.com