



Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc

(Kamloops Indian Band)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kamloops Indian Residential School missing children findings but a fraction of investigation and work need to bring peace to families and communities

July 15, 2021 – Kamloops. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc calls on people worldwide to bear witness to a very important truth about Indigenous People and Canada. Indian Residential Schools have been referred to as a historic dark chapter – but Indigenous people very much live with the repercussions today.

“We are here today to honour the missing children in our caretaking who may have experienced unthinkable circumstances leading to their death and whose remains were placed in unmarked graves. We are not here for retaliation. We are here for truth telling. We are mapping a way forward to bring peace to Kamloops Indian Residential School (KIRS) missing children, their families and their communities. We will follow the evidence and the science while we pay heed to what oral tellings KIRS survivors share with us,” affirmed Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir

Dr Sarah Beaulieu, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) specialist with expertise in Indigenous and city cemeteries as well as in search of unmarked Prisoner of War burials as part of Canada's WWI Internment Operations, conducted the investigation on behalf of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. From the onset of this preliminary survey, Secwepemc Knowledge Keepers were involved in this investigation. Dr. Beaulieu worked with both Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Monitors, acknowledging that cultural protocols are equally as important as the science behind ground penetrating radar and, given the nature and sensitivity of this work, one cannot be done without the other.

Between May 21-24th, 2021, 7000 square meters of land, was covered in the location that included the apple orchard in the Secwepemc Museum and Heritage Park. This area of interest was chosen for the survey based on a number of factors:

- Knowledge Keepers' oral histories that recall “children as young as 6 years old being woken in the night to dig holes for burials in the apple orchard”,
- A juvenile rib bone that surfaced in the same survey area, and
- A juvenile tooth was excavated from a shovel test pit during an impact assessment conducted by Simon Fraser University's archaeology department. (Note: a juvenile tooth is not an indicator of loss of life, but given both discoveries, this possibility should not be discounted.)

From Dr. Beaulieu's preliminary findings in May to today's results, reports providing additional information related to ground disturbances from both archaeological impact assessments as well as construction, in parts of this area, were subsequently provided to her. These reports were reviewed in order to determine which of these locations overlapped with the GPR survey areas. After this review, it was determined that there remain 200 targets of interest in these preliminary results.



Dr. Beaulieu noted that a preliminary investigation such as this is not intended to provide exact numbers or final results but rather to confirm the existence of burials. These results are as conclusive as GPR allows. Definitive results come from forensic investigation with excavation. Given Dr. Beaulieu's almost decade of work using GPR within a burial context, she confirmed that there are very likely to be many more human burials in the study area and that further remote sensing such as GPR should be conducted to locate all possible burials.

"We want to thank Dr. Beaulieu for her diligent work. We understand that this investigation is a mere fraction, covering just under 2 acres of a 160 acre residential school site. From KIRS survivor oral tellings, we know that further investigation is needed to ensure that we locate all the missing children in our caretakership," affirmed Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir.

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc identified the following as critical actions to be undertaken:

- **Student Attendance Records**

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc has the responsibility and obligation to identify the unmarked graves found within their jurisdiction. A critical first aspect to achieving those burdens is full and complete disclosure of the records held by the Canadian government and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate – specifically, the Student Attendance Records that were created by the institutions that administered Kamloops Indian Residential School.

Those primary documents, currently within the custody of the Canadian government, will be of critical importance to identify those lost children. Every student who ever attended Kamloops Indian Residential School is documented in those records.

"We are loathe to put the responsibility of identifying those lost on the survivors of Kamloops Indian Residential School who have been traumatized and retraumatized already. Thus, we call upon Prime Minister Trudeau and the Canadian government to share those attendance records as a first step in assisting Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc fulfilling their obligations regarding those lost without acknowledgement and as a step towards reconciliation," declared Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir.

Similarly, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc calls upon the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to open up their records immediately and fully.

- **Supports that enable Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc to undertake this important work both immediately and for the long term**

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc has worked diligently to prepare and submit a well thought out budget to immediately commence the important work to confirm and identify the missing children in their care.

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc calls upon both the federal and provincial governments to provide immediate and on-going funding and supports to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc as they develop and implement frameworks and processes to further identify, document, maintain, commemorate, and protect the remains of the children found buried at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, the site itself, and any additional supports required in undertaking this difficult work.

Access to experts is critical. This work requires significant resources that includes dedicated and qualified personnel to bring truth to light and peace to family members of the missing children. This is what drove Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc to reach out to the Canadian Archeological Association and the Institute of Indigenous



and Prairie Archeology. It is also why Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc are offering a free webinar next week on remote sensing and grave detection in partnership with them.

The Kamloops Indian Residential School was the largest in the Indian Affairs residential school system. From oral tellings of survivors and the records that have been able to be accessed to date, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc understand that students came from across British Columbia, some from Alberta and as far as the Yukon. To effectively work in the immediate and long term, both Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and the home communities of the missing children must be fully included and duly resourced.

Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc needs to be able to take care of their community members, survivors and intergenerational survivors. Our community member continue to seek a healing centre and programs that are trauma informed as well as trauma specific and reflect Secwepemc culture and values. This is an urgent matter of health and wellbeing that needs to be supported both in the immediate and long term.

Kamloops Indian Residential School survivors, along with other residential school survivors, have come forward from across the country expressing interest to share their experiences and truths relating to missing children, deaths, unmarked graves and experiences at residential school. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Oral Testimony Project will work in service to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and Kamloops Indian Residential School Survivors and intergenerational Survivors who wish to share their testimonies by recording, preserving and making them accessible in accordance with Survivors' and community direction.

Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond will be working to guide the process to ensure it meets the community requirements and also respects the human rights and choice of survivors to talk about their experiences as they feel is necessary and appropriate. A 1-800 number and email address will be provided at a later date for those who wish to participate in the Oral Telling Project. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc is ensuring that a comprehensive range of health and cultural supports will be available to Survivors during the process and will be providing updates shortly about partnerships involved in this important endeavour.

“To the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, we are still waiting for you to reach out to us to acknowledge the latest truths from the Kamloops Indian Residential School. I look forward to a fulsome conversation where we can finalise the details of the federal government providing needed supports, as well as access to our student attendance records, to continue to shed light on missing children buried in our care,” stated Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir.

Now aware of where their lost loved one may be buried, home communities and families of missing children seek peace and knowing as soon as possible. Now that the cries of the missing children have been heard, it time to show them love, honour, and respect. That means swiftly forming a team of archaeological and other technical experts so that the process may truly begin of confirming, identifying, and repatriating the children.

“We acknowledge that the work done to date represents but a fraction of the Kamloops Indian Residential School grounds and oral telling indicate that more investigation in other areas is required. This is a long process that will take significant time and resources. They were children, robbed of their families and their childhood. We need to now give them the dignity they never had,” affirmed Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir.

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Link to learn more about the July 22, 2021, Remote Sensing and Grave Detection Webinar for Indigenous communities and organisations: <https://tkemlups.ca/event/best-practices-in-remote-sensing-and-grave-detection/>