



TURTLE LODGE
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION AND WELLNESS



**National Centre for
Truth and Reconciliation**
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A COLLECTIVE STATEMENT REGARDING THE CHILDREN

**From the National Turtle Lodge Council of Elders and Knowledge Keepers
In Partnership with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – JULY 19, 2021

TURTLE LODGE, SAGKEENG FIRST NATION, MANITOBA – Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Youth Helpers from many different Nations across our homeland gathered from July 14-16, 2021 at the Turtle Lodge to seek guidance and direction in ceremony, in response to the recent uncovering of the graves of hundreds of children at residential schools across the country.

The Elders and Knowledge Keepers have been getting many requests from within their respective Nations about the protocols of how to best offer support to the children, their families, and the Nations: How do we find healing and peace? How do we help the children make their journey back home? How do we rekindle our identity as kind, strong, proud and vibrant Original Nations and Peoples, deeply connected to the Spirit and the land?

This was the first of three Statements that were issued by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers at the Gathering. The other two will follow shortly.

The Elders emphasized that dreams, visions, Ceremony, and listening to the messages that Nature provides are very important. Whenever we hear a dream, the heart recognizes it as the truth. Dreams and visions will help guide us in how we need to move forward. It is through Ceremony and with the help of the Elders that we will be able to interpret our dreams. Nature's Laws are self-enforcing. What we put into our circle always returns to our web of life. Nature is always giving us signs to bring us messages, through the winds, the weather, and the animals: the four-legged, the crawlers, the finned, and the winged. It is the responsibility of the Elders to teach the children to depend on their dreams, and to read and listen to the messages and instructions that Nature provides.

At the gathering, a special ceremony was conducted for the Children who had lost their lives in the residential schools. Elders and Youth shared dreams they have been



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receiving. Some of the dreams shared messages from deceased Children who have been trying to connect with the living, to ask for our help in conducting the necessary Ceremonies to help them make their spiritual journey home. There were dreams shared of Children revealing their horrible experiences of what had happened to them and the suffering they had endured before their lives were taken in unnatural ways. Other dreams were received of spiritual Grandmothers and Grandfathers offering advice and guidance on the Ceremonies that would be required to assist the Children in their return.

One message in particular came through: that the different Nations have their own ways of doing Ceremony to help connect with the Spirit, and that respect for diversity and autonomy is of paramount importance. Care must be taken not to impose one Nation's beliefs or ways upon another. Every community needs to take the lead and responsibility for its own territory, in keeping with the protocols, guidance and teachings from their Elders and ceremonies. We all have a responsibility to do our part. This journey will take a while, and we must join together in the spirit of unity using the uniqueness of our own ways.

The dreams highlighted the sanctity of the human spirit and the sacredness of the human body. They reminded us that a return to our original spirit and identity is of utmost importance. The dreams showed that the Creator's light is in everyone. Every living being has this same light. The Sun has this same light, as does the Sacred Fire. Those young children are still searching for this light, that was snuffed out.

The Elders shared common elements of Ceremonies that could be conducted for the Children, that include lighting the Sacred Fire, the Sunrise Ceremony, the Pipe Ceremony, the Drum, and the offering of tobacco, for those who follow the traditional practices of their ancestors. The Drum will remind the Children of the heartbeat of their Mothers, and of their Original Mother, the Earth. When we speak from our hearts in our original languages, this helps sustain the light the children are looking for. As the sun rises, we light our fires from the East to acknowledge the Creator's light that lives in the heart. The light of the sun and the fire will act like a beacon to welcome the Children and guide them home to the spirit.

The Grandmothers and the Mothers have a special spiritual connection to the Children, as the life-givers of our Nations. Bringing the Grandmothers' love into our ceremonies can help us to consider what it must have been like for these Children in those last minutes, and to remember how very blessed we are to have our Children in our lives.



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The love we have for our Children can unite us all. The Elders welcome all in our homeland to join in these prayers and Ceremonies of support for the children who were lost. This includes each and every member of our Nations, and people of all Nations, colours, faiths, and religious traditions. Respect is key. When we come together for a common cause, in our own ways, the act of coming together creates unity and strength. The Elders have endorsed a call for a Global Sunrise Ceremony around the world, to honour the sun and connect to the light. More information will follow regarding times and dates of the Global Sunrise Ceremony.

The Children whose graves are being uncovered are speaking on behalf of the Children today, reminding us of our responsibilities to ensure the children are given everything they need to live a good life. Those Children would have been our future leaders, our Knowledge Keepers, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, our teachers. To honour these Children, we need to focus on our Children today who have been left behind, many of whom are lost and need to come home to find their true spirit. Many of our Children are grieving for their way of life and the land, and struggling with addictions, depression, and suicide. We need to do better in loving and caring for our Children, repositioning them into the centre of our lives.

The Elders emphasize that it is our Ancestral way of life, our Ceremonies, our Drums, our Pipes, and Rattles, our Sacred Lodges and the comfort offered by Mother Earth herself, that hold the key to healing and moving forward. We each have a responsibility to ensure our children have a spiritual foundation and are provided opportunities to find their identity and connect to our original Mother, the Earth. We need to provide more opportunities for our children to receive their Spiritual Names, and participate in Rites of Passage Ceremonies, where they themselves learn to seek the spiritual direction of their purpose in life.

Our Children and Young People must be supported and empowered, to know they have everything they need within themselves. We can support them in connecting to their spirit, finding their identity and nurturing their spiritual gifts in our Ceremonies, in our Sacred Lodges and on the land. Our Children must be encouraged to share their dreams, which the Elders can help to interpret. Each of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, has a shared responsibility to restore the memory, teachings, and ancestral practices of our way of life.



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Finally, the Elders offered this message to the Children and Youth of today, “Those Children did not have the chance to live a full life, but you do. You can live a full life for yourself, to honour those Children. We encourage you to be proud of who you are, embrace your identity, to feel the love the land has for you. As Elders, we are here to support and guide you as you learn more about our beautiful way of life.”

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