



TURTLE LODGE
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION AND WELLNESS



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

A COLLECTIVE STATEMENT REGARDING THE SACRED SITES

**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 20, 2021

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

This was the second of three Statements that were issued by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers at the National Gathering. The first Statement prioritized the Children who have been found and the Children of today, who need to be positioned as the focal point of all our efforts. The third Statement will follow shortly.

The Elders encourage us to move towards independence, to help our Children of today make their way back home, to help our Nations find healing, unity and peace, and to rekindle our identity as kind, strong, proud and vibrant Original Nations and Peoples, deeply connected to the Spirit and the land.

The Elders discussed supportive acts that they felt would help our Nations rebuild and heal from the devastating effects of domination that have taken place over the last 500 years in our homeland. Through the legislation of the Indian Act for many years we were denied access to our Sacred Sites. It has only been in recent times that our People have begun to make our way back, to begin at our places of beginning. The Elders and Knowledge Keepers shared that the first step in establishing our independence and autonomy is by reactivating our Sacred Sites in all our Nations, across the country.

Since Creation, our beginning, our Nations have gathered on our Sacred Sites. They gathered to share knowledge, medicines, ceremonies, and prophecies. For the Original People, making a journey to our Sacred Sites helps us to reconnect to the Great Spirit in our lives, in the same way people of other cultures make pilgrimages to their sacred places. For us, the land and a journey to our Sacred Sites is a living manifestation of the



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divine. In making the journey back to our Sacred Sites, we can begin our real healing and receive the fullness of our spiritual connection and our connection to the land.

If there is to be a full spirit of reconciliation, our Sacred Sites must be returned back into our care. Apologies and money are one step in providing some comfort but can only go so far. The reclaiming of our Sacred Sites is an act of great significance. As the First Peoples, we must articulate our full autonomy of our Sacred Sites. This will be the foundation of our rebirth and resurgence as a People in our arrival back to the spiritual ways of our Ancestors.

Establishing the autonomy of our Sacred Sites will allow us to position the Children at the centre of our lives. The Children whose graves are being uncovered are speaking on behalf of the Children today, reminding us of our responsibilities to ensure our Children are given everything they need to live a good life. We must support our Children by providing opportunities for connecting to their spirit, finding their identity and nurturing their spiritual gifts in our Ceremonies, in our Sacred Lodges and on the land, beginning at our Sacred Sites.

Prophecy foretold that this land would be returned to us, and it is our responsibility to lead in the stewardship of the land. This will not happen until we fully embrace our identity as the Original People. We have to follow the spiritual ways of our Ancestors. Through natural law, the land will respond to the expression of our identity.

Sacred Sites provide the physical foundation for our Nations' Creation Stories. The Sacred Sites are the golden thread that connects each generation to our Ancestors and knits us into the fabric of our culture and identity.

Sacred Sites play an important role in our health and well-being. They are culturally and ecologically important places for our future generations. Returning to our Sacred Sites, to spiritually care for and connect to the land and our Ancestors, will provide healing and improve the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental wellness of our children and the next generations.

The Sacred Sites will ground us in our identity and bring us our dreams and visions. At the Sacred Site, we can build places of education – Sacred Teaching and Healing Lodges led by the First Peoples – to learn about the ways of our Ancestors and find our way again. We call on our brothers and sisters of all colours to help support the



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reclaiming of our Sacred Sites and the building of these Sacred Lodges, which will stand as beacons to guide us home.

The Elders remind us that we each have a beautiful gift to share and an identity, complete with original instructions on how to take care of each other and our home, Mother Earth. All people are welcome to contribute to the return of our Sacred Sites and building of these Sacred Lodges. Each of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, has a shared responsibility to restore the memory, teachings, and ancestral practices of our way of life. We call on our brothers and sisters – our allies in our homeland – to come forward to help us in a show of support, to give from the heart using their individual skills, talents and contributions.

We have an existing model that came through a vision called the Turtle Lodge – *Debwegamik* – a place of healing, learning, truth, spiritual law, natural law – a place of the heart. It is a place today that Elders from many Nations refer to as our Central House of Knowledge. The Turtle Lodge is an example of living our autonomy and ensuring we always follow a ceremonial context in most everything we do. When the original vision of the Turtle Lodge was received in dream and in Ceremony, part of that vision showed that the first Grandmother Turtle Lodge would give birth to other Turtle Lodges.

The Elders are calling to extend this model of the Turtle Lodge, beginning by building a Turtle Lodge at the Sacred Site of *Manitou Api* at the geographical centre in the heartland of Turtle Island, that would act as the Centre to the individual Sacred Lodges in different Nations across the country. This would be a place to unify our Nations at a central location at the *Manitou Api* Sacred Site, where we can gather and connect to our Ancestors.

The Turtle Lodge is a model that can exist in any part of our homeland and around the world for those who want to share and learn the original teachings that reflect the spiritual identity of their Nation. The vision of these Turtle Lodges is to create an experience of spirit, connected to the land. It is really up to the people whether they wish to be a part of the original spiritual vision received and to take advantage of this model of the Turtle Lodge – honouring the free choice of the people.

Finally, the Elders shared that we have arrived in a time when we need to build on values that support life, values that stem from the heart – being kind, humble, showing respect, loving all of creation. Our memory of these values and our original instructions



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as the Original Peoples will be kindled and awakened as we make our journey back into our Sacred Sites.

The National Turtle Lodge Council of Elders and Knowledge Keepers will be called together again soon in Ceremony to seek further spiritual guidance and direction that can help guide us in establishing our autonomy at our Sacred Sites and to improve the health and well-being of all our Children.