

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

January 25, 2022

### First Nations Leadership Council Stands with Williams Lake First Nation During Search for Unmarked Graves

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.)– The First Nations Leadership Council is calling for support for the Williams Lake First Nation as it releases the results of the search for unmarked graves on the grounds of the Saint Joseph’s Mission. Saint Joseph’s Mission operated a residential school from 1886-1981. There have already been a number of confirmed deaths of children there, as well as many cases of abuse by the school’s staff that have resulted in criminal charges.

“We know from stories from survivors that thousands of children died while attending these so-called schools,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations. “Ground penetrating radar is finally allowing us the ability to locate where many of them are buried, and helps give their families and communities closure. We commend and recognize Williams Lake First Nation in undertaking critical, emotionally taxing, and (re)traumatizing work related to burials at the former St. Joseph’s Mission Residential school site and we stand in support as they undertake this important work.”

“We hold our hands up to the Williams Lake First Nation for sharing their preliminary report findings and providing an overview of the very important work ahead for their community as they search for the lost children buried at the former site of the St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School. Most importantly, we hold our hands up to the elders and knowledge keepers who have assisted by sharing their traumatic memories,” said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “Thousands of unmarked burials have been uncovered across Canada over the past several months. Each and every one of these lost children from the horrific Indian Residential School system deserve recognition, remembrance and a chance to be found, no matter how long it takes. We once again call on the federal and provincial governments to continue providing the necessary resources for each and every First Nation in Canada that had an Indian Residential School in their traditional territory, to undertake the important work of finding the lost children.”

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer, concluded, “Today is another somber day and are our hearts are with all survivors and their families. UBCIC continues to stand with Williams Lake First Nation, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc and all other Nations currently undertaking the painful, traumatizing task of identifying and honouring stolen children. The Government of Canada and the Roman Catholic Church have ultimately failed to document and protect the deceased children of the residential schools, and it is up to them to achieve accountability, reparations, and supports for residential school survivors and all those impacted by the atrocities of the past.”

The release of findings will be livestreamed from the Williams Lake First Nation Facebook Page at 1:00pm on January 25th, found at: <https://www.facebook.com/williamslakefirstnation>



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For support for Residential School Survivors or others who are impacted by these difficult findings, please reach out to the Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society at 1-800-721-0066 or [www.irsss.ca](http://www.irsss.ca).

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

**For further comment please contact:**

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