

First Nations Summit

NEWS RELEASE

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Path forward cannot be rooted in denialism; reflections on the 5th Anniversary of the 215

(xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC) – Five years ago, Tkemlúps te Secwepemc (Kamloops Indian Band) called upon people worldwide to bear witness to the shocking discovery of 215 unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (KIRS). Today, on the fifth anniversary of Tkemlúps' announcement, amidst a targeted rise in residential school denialism and anti-Indigenous racism in the province, we stand with Tkemlúps and all First Nations in their paths toward healing and reconciliation.

“On the fifth anniversary of the discovery of unmarked graves at KIRS, we reflect on the resilience and strength of First Nations here in our province and nationally, as they continue to carry forward the truths survivors have shared for generations,” said Robert Phillips, FNS political executive member. “Despite growing denialism, our communities continue to lead with dignity and an unwavering commitment to truth and healing. Reconciliation is not possible without honesty and without coming together to accept the shared responsibility and the hard work that meaningful reconciliation hinges on.”

In the past year, there has been a drastic increase in residential school denialism, a growing disinformation movement that manipulates well-established, well-documented facts about Canada's residential school system and the firsthand accounts from survivors, their families, and importantly, the firsthand accounts from the Crown itself. Not only does this disinformation distort the realities of Canada's colonial history, but it also causes direct and immediate harm to survivors, their families, and First Nations people as racist rhetoric continues to be guised as ‘uncovering the truth.’ Members of Parliament have been emboldened to introduce racist private member's bills to prohibit land acknowledgements, remove Truth and Reconciliation Day as a provincial holiday, and to repeal the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

“Beyond accepting objective truths corroborated by the Crown's own documentation, there is a moral imperative to stand with survivors, bear witness to their truth, and more importantly defend it. Silence and denial continue to perpetuate harm and quietly permit these attempts to minimize the legacy of residential schools,” stated Hugh Braker, FNS political executive member.

“Residential school denialists continue to disregard scientific evidence, historical documentation, and firsthand accounts from survivors; this is not truth seeking, it is the deliberate denial of what is right in front of them,” said Laxele'wuts'aat, Chief Shana Thomas, FNS political executive member. “The suggestion to disrupt resting places and exhume bodies to satisfy the thirst for further “proof” of what First Nations people experienced at the hands of the colonial government is not only abysmal and immoral, but it is a decision that solely lies with respective First Nations, their protocols and laws, and the families of those victims. The path forward cannot be rooted in denial and dehumanization, it must be grounded in respect, accountability, continued transparency, and meaningful action toward reconciliation.”

Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc hosted a commemoration for the 5th anniversary of the day of reflection today, Monday, May 25, 2026, that began at 6 am with Sacred Fire, followed by a Commemorative Walk at 12:30 pm.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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