



## Statement from Gimaa Nootchtai

I would like to speak upon the recovery of the children on the various sites of the residential schools across Canada. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the families affected and to all of our Survivors. I would like to emphasise that our focus right now is on the Survivors. It is also important to acknowledge and focus on the investigations and continuing them. As we recover more and more children at various sites, I realize that this entire process of investigating and recovering more children is very traumatic and devastating to Survivors and their families. I know it is causing a lot of pain for our people who are being traumatized and re-traumatized.

It is especially important to focus on the Survivors of these institutions and provide them with the support through all of this. Our focus right now should not be on Canada or the churches, it should be on our people and the Survivors. I certainly agree that we need accountability from Canada and the Churches, but let's keep our Survivors in the forefront. I acknowledge that our People are angry and upset, they have every reason to be as I am feeling the same way. Gimaa and Council want the Government and Churches to be held accountable for the crimes they committed.

Moving forward as Nations, we must be united and be clear on what we are fighting for. I believe making real change is going to be grassroots, it is going to be our Survivors that are going to give us guidance and direction on how we move forward. We need to help them through this difficult time, and we need to move towards reconciliation for them and for all of us as First Nations people. I, along with many other Leaders across Turtle Island, do not believe that Canada or the Churches have been properly held accountable within the legal court system. My job as a leader is to protect all our Nation's members, and that is what we are going to do, in our community and in the court systems. The legacy of Canada's genocide continues on in the penal and child welfare systems as well, so we have to address these issues as they stem from the residential schools.

We want to make sure that we are going to do this in "a good way," the way our ancestors would have wanted us to do. Coming together as a Nation and to say, "here is what happened and here is what we need to do to make sure this does not ever happen again." I want to make this clear to all our Atikameksheng Survivors and families, we are all behind you, we are going to do everything we can to make sure you are safe, to make sure that you are supported. We are also going to seek your guidance, your support, and your direction on how we can move together as a Nation, even within the court system. Currently the legal court system is the only way to get some accountability from the Government and Churches. As a leader, I am uncomfortable having the Government lead these investigations, they should not be investigating their own crimes, so I will ensure that we take the lead on these investigations along with our Sister Nations.





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We must also change the way we talk about these institutions. I will not call these institutions “schools” because they were never schools; they were prisons, they were concentration camps, that is what they were. We need to be clear on that narrative, we must stop calling them residential schools. These institutions were places of torture, brain washing, and the legacy of those institutions still live on. We do not see our true history in the curriculums and internally and externally we need to change that narrative. We need to call them for what they truly were, and they need to be brought forth to mainstream Canada.

Many people called for the cancellation of Canada Day; I do not believe canceling Canada Day is the right thing to do. Canada is not going to start canceling things which are embedded into their constitution, and this is not how we can affect real change. Instead of causing harm to others or to property to get our point across, let’s focus our energy on healing each other. Let’s focus on removing the lateral violence from our Nation. Let’s focus on raising our kids to be proud of who they are. Let’s focus on being a Nation that is sovereign and proud. Let’s focus on educating and empowering ourselves so that we can truly be sovereign. Let’s focus on being the warriors that fight with a feather in our hands and peace in our hearts. Let’s focus on being the Nation that will do its best to uphold our part of the Treaty. Let’s do everything opposite of what they tried to force us to become in those horrible places. If we seek reconciliation through violence, then they will win.

We need to focus more on building allies within our fellow Canadians, that is the real spirit of our Treaty. We signed the Treaty so that both our Nations can live and prosper as neighbours. My job as a leader of our Nation is to uphold the spirit of our Treaty and if we are going to go against that we may be doing more harm than good to ourselves. There is no doubt that we do have to change their perception on the whole legacy of these institutions, they need to recognize that these institutions were a part of a bigger strategy from Canada and the Churches. We must continue to voice the message that their plans were put in place to wipe our people out. It is still the same today, wiping us out of our traditions, culture, and language by way of the Indian Act and not recognizing us as a Nation. The Canadian government still maintains a paternalistic relationship with us, saying we are not competent enough to run our own Nation so we will do that for you, and we will dictate everything to you. Even today there are still underlying issues of that strategy from Canada and is very well alive today and we are dealing with those institutions again.

We are here to support the Survivors right now, we are here to provide everything you need to get through the repeated traumatization, and it is important that our Survivors know we are here for them, and it is you that we need, and we need your guidance. It is important to keep the focus on the Survivors right now. We need to come together as Atikameksheng and create our own plan to heal from this terrible legacy. As your Gimaa, I will take that plan and bring it to the forefront if it means taking Canada and the Churches to court, whatever it takes to help our Survivors and their families heal.

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Let us take care of each other and produce a plan of how we are going to move forward to make sure Canada and the Churches are held accountable for the genocide of our People. That is our Truth and Reconciliation. Let us take ownership of this and call for allies amongst our brothers and sisters in our sister Nations. Let us also call for allies that are in our neighbouring communities and across Canada. Let us call upon them to support us and I believe if we do this in a good way, we will find that we have a lot of allies who will support us.

We will need to undertake this work at all different levels, from grassroots, to leadership, and within the court systems. We will need to be strategic in our planning to ensure that we continue to provide the support those that are still hurting. We need to come together and stand united against Canada and the Churches and make them accountable on our terms. We will do this together as a strong, proud, and sovereign Nation. Like our Ancestors would want us to.

If at any time you would like to talk about our plan moving forward, please do not hesitate to call me at 705-665-2157 or email me at [gimaa@wfn.com](mailto:gimaa@wfn.com) I am here to listen. Stay safe, pray for each other, support each other, and take care of each other.

Miigwetch, Baa Maa Pii

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*Niimid Mukwa*

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