

Canada searches for graves of thousands of indigenous children



Ottawa, October 23 (RHC)-- Canadian researchers are attempting to solve a century-old mystery into the disappearance and alleged death of thousands of Indigenous students who vanished during the 1900's.

Some 150,000 indigenous students were sent to Catholic boarding schools between 1883 and 1998 in an effort to assimilate the children. However, the institutions were ripe with cases of abuse and neglect which a 2015 report from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission described as "cultural genocide."

The report stated that at least 3,200 students died while attending these religious education centers, but the true figure is likely to be much higher. Officials at the time often failed to register a student's name, gender, or cause of a death and neglected to notify the parents.

Although the lack of resources, proper school records, and missing documents have stunted past investigations, a team of researchers from the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation hopes to offer some closure to the aging relatives of the missing students.

"There are scant resources being provided to do this work. We know some of those cemetery locations now sit under parking lots," said Ry Moran, director of the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation.

Earlier this year, the Canadian government donated \$500,000 to the initiative and continues to “work closely” on the case, a spokesman for the department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada said.

Research shows that the highest cause of death was suicide, fires, freezing, or illness such as tuberculosis or typhoid. Experts believe locating the student’s graves will be easy because the majority will be near the schools’ vicinity.

Moran said the initial registry of deceased students is expected to be completed by March 2019, however, there will likely be more to come as there are “literally millions of more documents to review.”

Some religious groups who operated the schools have yet to share their records, Moran said, adding that although some groups- such as the Anglican Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, United Church of Canada, Jesuits of English Canada- have offered apologies for the offenses perpetrated against the indigenous people, the Catholic church has repeatedly refused.

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