



On January 7, 1998, the Canadian government issued a "Statement of Reconciliation" contained within a document entitled *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. This is an excerpt from that document:

The ancestors of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples lived on this continent long before explorers from other continents first came to North America. For thousands of years before this country was founded, they enjoyed their own forms of government. Diverse, vibrant

Aboriginal nations had ways of life rooted in fundamental values concerning their relationships to the Creator, the environment, and each other, in the role of Elders as the living memory of their ancestors, and in their responsibilities as custodians of the lands, waters and resources of their homelands.

Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. ... We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of Aboriginal people and nations.

The [Residential School system] separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse.

The government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools. Particularly to those individuals who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools, and who have carried this burden believing that in some way they must be responsible, we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry.

A strategy to begin the reconciliation, *Gathering Strength*, featured the announcement of a \$350m healing fund, and on March 31, 1998, the *Aboriginal Healing Foundation* was created to manage the fund. It was given one year to organize, four years to spend or commit the funds and five years to monitor projects and produce a report.

<www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/gs/index_e.html>