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Speaking notes, Honourable Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta.

Alberta seeks renewed relationship with First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples of Alberta.

June 22, 2015

Ministerial Statement

Truth and Reconciliation, Residential Schools and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On June 2nd the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada held a special event in our nation's capital.

For six years leading up to this, thousands of courageous First Nations, Metis and Inuit people spoke their truth about the devastating experience of residential schools.

We as Canadians bore witness to that truth.

We were shocked and at times rendered speechless as we learned of the First Nation, Metis and Inuit children forcibly removed from their homes, placed beyond the protection and love of their families.

We felt deeply for the adults who shared their journey to come to terms with the broken child within.

They have given us their truth.

Now, as Albertans and Canadians, it is up to us become a part of this healing journey – through acts of reconciliation.

As Justice Murray Sinclair so poignantly stated:

We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is ready to follow the path.

As our first step, we want the First Nation, Metis and Inuit people of Alberta to know that we deeply regret the profound harm and damage that occurred to generations of children forced to attend residential schools.

Although the Province of Alberta did not establish this system, members of this Chamber did not take a stand against it.

For this silence, we apologize.

These schools broke the connection between child and family...between community, language and culture.

These children too often lost the ability to connect again with their families...losing their identity and the confidence to pass on their traditions to their own children.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we also deeply regret the intergenerational damage that perpetuates itself in poverty, neglect, drug addiction, mental health issues, and great despair.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we are joined by many proud members of the First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities of Alberta. Many are residential

To these honoured guests and to the residential school survivors of Alberta, I would like to say:

As children you entered those schools alone and frightened.

This past is too painful to endure on your own.

In the journey of reconciliation you no longer have to walk alone.

Your truth has woken our conscience and our sense of justice.

True reconciliation will only be achieved if we as governments and citizens are willing to make a fundamental shift in our relationship with the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples of Alberta.

We will do that.

Yesterday was National Aboriginal Day.

On the longest day of the year, we shone the light on the distinct cultures, histories and heritage of First Nations, Metis and Inuit people in Alberta.

Today, I want that light to illuminate the hearts of all Albertans.

I want the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women to come out of the shadows and be viewed with compassion and understanding in the clear light of day.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission spoke to a devastating link between the large number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the many harmful factors in their lives, such as domestic violence, poverty and the number of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system.

Mr. Speaker, the Executive Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also stated that this complex interplay of factors are part of the legacy of residential schools, and this must be examined alongside the lack of success of police forces in solving these crimes against Aboriginal women.

Too many indigenous women are missing.

Too many indigenous families have suffered.

Too many communities don't have the answers they need.

When Helen Betty Osborne was murdered in The Pas Manitoba it took more than 16 years for charges to be brought forward.

During those 16 years, there were people who knew who was guilty – but said nothing.

It was called a conspiracy of silence.

That was 43 years ago.

Today, out of that long, unsettling silence a strong and determined voice has emerged.

We hear that voice across our province... in the growing movement within the hearts and homes of Albertans, from family members and friends of those who are gone, and in moving art exhibits from those who were touched by the tragedies of our silent sisters.

Mr. Speaker, today our government joins these voices.

Today, Alberta joins the call for a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal women.

Our hearts...and a strong sense of justice and humanity compels us to speak loudly and clearly for these young, beautiful women who were mothers, daughters... sisters... who were deeply loved and are now deeply missed.

We join the families, national Aboriginal organizations, the provinces and territories to lend our voice to the call for a national inquiry, because it is the right thing to do.

We must openly face the root causes that place Aboriginal women and girls at the highest risk.

Harsh realities like poverty, racism, inadequate housing and lack of educational opportunities, among them.

Until these root causes are addressed, the violence will continue.

action on these root causes, once and for all.

Because we understand that true reconciliation is a matter of action, not just words.

There is good work being done out there, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta is working with Aboriginal communities and organizations to improve the lives and safety of Aboriginal women through local solutions such as supporting the Moose Hide campaign which is aimed at men taking a stand against violence towards Aboriginal women and girls;

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is working with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts on a Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls; and, analyzing the data from community engagement to determine best practices for a culturally safe victim services response.

Our government is working with Aboriginal communities to address issues with early intervention supports to help keep children safe and families together, and involving the extended family and the community when a child first becomes involved in our system.

And we will also work with the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Metis Women's Economic Security Council on the issue of trafficking of women and girls in Canada, as it relates to missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to work with Aboriginal communities and organizations until Aboriginal women in Alberta can see a future for themselves that is safe and fulfilling.

So in this time of summer solstice we will not let the light dim on the crisis taking place across our province and country.

With full conviction, we lend our voice and our conscience to doing right by the women, their families and their communities.

The silence that once was, has long since passed.

We will not fail these women.

Not this time.

Now is the time for their voices to be heard, by all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you.



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« *Alberta becomes second province to apologize to residential school survivors, then calls for action on MMIW (<https://aptnnews.ca/2015/06/23/alberta-becomes-first-province-apologize-residential-schools-calls-action-mmiw/>)*