



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 29, 2022

Tšilhqot'in Chiefs Call for Meaningful Role in St. Joseph's Mission Site-Investigation

Williams Lake, B.C.: As the Prime Minister and Minister Marc Miller prepare to visit the site of St. Joseph's Mission this week, the Tšilhqot'in Chiefs are calling for a meaningful role in the site-investigation of this former residential school to promote healing for Tšilhqot'in survivors and families.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation affirms the importance of site investigation at St. Joseph's Mission to bring to light the atrocities experienced by generations of children at that site. The Nation also acknowledges the special role of Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) in this work, as St. Joseph's Mission is situated on traditional WLFN lands.

At the same time, St. Joseph's Mission was the main residential school for the six Tšilhqot'in communities (as well as Nuxalk, Southern Dakelh, Northern Secwepemc, and others). Generations of Tšilhqot'in children were taken to St. Joseph's Mission and every Tšilhqot'in community and family is impacted by this legacy of trauma. Tšilhqot'in survivors carry stories of the atrocities committed at that site and the children that did not return to their families.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation has repeatedly asked for a respectful approach to the site investigation that would see all affected Nations represented on a planning committee to guide this sensitive work in a way that respects the culture and protocols of *each* Nation. Unfortunately, these requests have not been honoured. Instead, Tšilhqot'in Chiefs are invited to occasional "updates", sometimes with less than 48 hours' notice.

The Tšilhqot'in Chiefs are deeply concerned that the current site-investigation process is bringing more trauma, and not healing, for the Tšilhqot'in people, as the communities grieve several tragic losses of life in recent weeks from overdoses and suicide.

The Tšilhqot'in Chiefs will not attend or participate in the events at St. Joseph's Mission with the Prime Minister and Minister Miller this week.

The Tšilhqot'in Chiefs call on the Prime Minister, Minister Miller, and WLFN leadership to commit to establishing a planning committee for the St. Joseph's site investigation that includes Tšilhqot'in Chiefs, along with leadership from all affected First Nations.

D O W N T O W N O F F I C E

L A K E S I D E O F F I C E

253 4th Avenue North
Williams Lake, BC V2G 4T4
Ph: (250)-392-3918
Fax: (250)-398-5798

1729 South Lakeside Drive
Williams Lake, BC V2G 3A9
Ph: (778)-799- 2145
Fax: (778)-799-2142



Quote:

Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair, Tsilhqot'in National Government

“This site-investigation has already caused so much trauma in our communities. It only adds to the trauma when we are treated like bystanders to a process that affects our families and our communities so deeply. Nobody speaks for our Nation but us. We have asked for a seat at the table many times without action. We are asking for a meaningful planning role in this process so that our protocols, our leadership and our ceremonies are respected and honoured. We also call on BC and Canada to recognize the special significance of the St. Joseph’s Mission grounds and take steps to secure these lands on behalf of all affected Nations as a sacred historical site.”

-30-

The Tsilhqot'in National Government (TNG) recognizes that the information regarding Indian Residential Schools could be triggering for people. Support is available to anyone affected by the ongoing effects of Residential Schools. The National Indian Residential School Crisis Line can be reached 24-hours a day, 7-days a week at **1-866-925-4419**.

Media Contact:

Jacey Warne
Communications Manager
Tsilhqot'in National Government
(778)-267-6197
jwarne@tsilhqotin.ca