

First Nations Summit

STATEMENT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FNS Statement on recent church burnings

(Xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC) – Leaders of the First Nations Summit (FNS) are deeply concerned by recent vandalism and the burning down of several churches in BC.

It is undeniable that the Indian Residential School (IRS) system was created to strip our people of every element of our cultures and assimilate us into Canadian society. Much anger has re-surfaced with the burial confirmations and because of the lack of willingness by churches to admit to this responsibility and to share and grant complete access the historical records in their possession.

Words cannot express our deep sorrow for the many lost children whose remains have now been found at several former Indian Residential School sites. It is unconscionable to think of how many children's lives were taken and cast aside in hidden or unmarked graves. The confirmations of these unmarked grave sites are a representation of the genocide our people were subject to through the government and church IRS system.

While we fully understand the trauma and pain that the burial confirmations have resulted in for IRS survivors, family members, and community members, the path forward is not through the unilateral destruction of, or vandalism to, places of worship within our communities.

We must remember that many of these places of worship within our communities were constructed by community elders, many of whom continue to practice their beliefs within these places or worship.

We encourage community members, elders, knowledge keepers and youth to actively engage with their leadership to reach collective community decisions on the matter of removing or keeping these institutions. The path forward should be determined by the collective and not by the unsanctioned actions of individuals.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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