

Open Letter to Filipinos in Canada to Support the Demands of Indian Residential School Survivors

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdbjWr2705PcHHglk1CAJCF1jdAE-TAhM-HmrhYQFz2Rvgh3w/viewform>

21 June 2021

AS FILIPINO/A/X BASED in this place called Canada, we make this pledge to call upon our families, friends, and fellow community members to join with Indigenous communities in their call for the Roman Catholic Church to take responsibility for atrocities it caused in Catholic-run residential schools. We represent different facets of the Filipino/a/x community – we come from different home regions, workplaces, professions, beliefs, sexualities, genders, and generations.

On 27 May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Nation confirmed the remains of 215 children who were students of the Catholic-run Kamloops Indian Residential School.¹ The 215 Indigenous children from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and neighbouring Nations are part of the thousands of Indigenous children that never returned home from residential schools.² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada uncovered that more than 4,100 children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities died while attending a residential school. It has now been well documented that Indian residential schools were part of Canada's attempt to eliminate Indigenous peoples and undermine their self-determination by separating families and relations.

We join with Indigenous Peoples in saying that it is time for the Catholic Church to be accountable and take responsibility.

We write this letter because the majority of us have grown up in or are part of the Roman Catholic faith. As Filipina/o/xs living in Canada, we must do our part to recognize our responsibilities to the Indigenous Peoples and Nations whose territories and lands we live and work on.

¹ <https://tkemlups.ca/wp-content/uploads/05-May-27-2021-TteS-MEDIA-RELEASE.pdf>.

² <http://www.trc.ca/events-and-projects/missing-children-project.html>.

The introduction of Catholicism in the Philippines was part of the Spanish colonial project and later supported by the US empire's colonial occupation and its Christian ideologies. We have grown up or are part of the Roman Catholic Church because of colonialism. We now live in Canada because of colonialism. The Catholic Church played a critical role in the colonization and the making of Canada. We must do what we can to understand our complicated relationships to the Catholic Church and its role in colonization where we now live and work.

To recognize and practise our responsibilities to the Indigenous Peoples and Nations whose territories we live on is an ongoing process. **In the immediate, we urge our families, friends, and fellow community members to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action #58–#61 on "Church Apologies and Reconciliation."**

Call to Action #58 urges "the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools."

We urge our families, friends, and fellow community members to take these calls to action to heart and bring the demands of residential school survivors and their communities to their own networks and churches in whatever capacity they are able and can influence.

Our signatures here show our commitment to call on the Catholic Church to apologize. We commit to listening and learning from residential school survivors and their families as we strengthen our relationships with Indigenous communities.

Maraming salamat po.

UPDATE

On June 21st we sent out an "Open Letter to Filipinos in Canada to Support the Demands of Indian Residential School Survivors." The letter asks our families, friends, and fellow community members to stand with Indigenous survivors of Catholic-run residential schools. The response to the letter has been positive and a clear indication that many of us are committed to learning more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. While we recognize that practising our responsibilities to the Indigenous Peoples and Nations on whose territories we live on is an ongoing process, we hoped that the letter would encourage Filipinx/o/as in Canada to take concrete and immediate steps

to support the calls and demands of Indigenous communities in relation to residential schools.

With 1000+ signatures from different communities and geographies, thank you to everyone who signed and circulated the letter. We thank each of you for adding your voice to this pledge and for centreing survivors.

As a show of solidarity, we have sent the letter to the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS), as well as the community of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc.

Moving forward, may we continue to mobilize our communities to take concrete steps to support survivors and their families.

Maraming salamat po.