



NATIONAL CHIEF ROSEANNE ARCHIBALD'S MESSAGE TO SURVIVORS AT MASKWACIS PAPAL VISIT

55 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1600, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6L5 • 55, rue Metcalfe, Suite 1600, Ottawa (Ontario) K1P 6L5

EDMONTON, AB – AFN National Chief RoseAnne Archibald was informed at yesterday's welcome ceremony for Pope Francis that she won't be permitted to speak to survivors at today's papal visit in Maskwacis. Provided here is her message to survivors:

"Wahcheeyay Misiway. First, I want to acknowledge the Creator, the world around us, our place within it, and the traditional lands of Treaty 6 upon which we gather. Meegwetch Chief Ermineskin and Grand Chief Arcand for hosting this gathering today. As National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, I welcome His Holiness Pope Francis to our traditional lands, in good faith, on his penitential journey towards truth and reconciliation.

In truth, it is with a great deal of conflict I join you today; but it's important for First Nations children and survivors and intergenerational trauma survivors to know that their National Chief stands with them. I do. It's also important for me, personally, to be here on behalf of my family. I have four members of my immediate family who went to St. Anne's in northern Ontario, including my mother, and my sister who died in St. Anne's. So, make no mistake about it, I am reluctant to be in contact with this Church establishment. I do not condone the Church's history of supporting injustice and I am strongly opposed to any organization who doesn't protect women but does protect those who abuse children.

Women are the backbone of our society and children represent our future. Generations of Indigenous children have experienced and continue to experience trauma because of colonialism—colonial systems, colonial beliefs, colonial mindsets—as perpetrated and justified by the 1493 papal bull supporting the Doctrine of Discovery. I have personally asked Pope Francis to formally revoke this vile document.

The systemic racism that we as Indigenous people have experienced and continue to experience has had major consequences on outcomes of poverty, substance abuse, violence, and mental health. In her own words, one First Nations matriarch said she grew up a very mean woman because of what happened to her—and she's not alone. More than 150,000 children were sent to what I no longer call schools; I call them what they were: institutions of assimilation and genocide. Schools don't have graveyards.

Now today we're breaking the cycle with our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

I recognize that I am an intergenerational trauma survivor and we all have our own stories to share. I woke up today thinking of my mom, who was both a traditional Cree woman and a Catholic. If my mom were alive today, she'd accept the Pope's words of apology and emanate love and forgiveness as she always did; and she wouldn't be alone. For some survivors, it is necessary to their healing journey to receive the Pope's apology and offer forgiveness. For others, it is a somber occasion of mixed and deeply distressing emotions. Reactions to this papal visit are all individual, powerful, and valid.

My message to all survivors is that you are loved and deeply cared for and there is support for you—certainly here in Maskwacis today but also in the days and weeks ahead, and beyond that, as you move gently through your healing process.

For survivors and all our peoples, I say I love every single one of you and I care what happens to you and every person in your community. I continue to hold a positive vision of happy, healthy children surrounded by the love and care of their families, living in safe, vibrant communities.

All in all, as National Chief, I will remain cautious and critical of the Church. I will also remain committed to the healing path forward.

Ninanaskamon. Kisahkeetin."

For more information please contact:

Andrew St. Germain
Office of the National Chief
ast-germain@afn.ca