

**Open letter on Canadian Federal Government's June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Apology to First Nations, Métis and Inuit on residential schools by Tim Brown, Ontario Federation of Labour Vice-President representing Aboriginal Persons.**

**I first say GITCHI MIIGWETCH to all those who called me or greeted me in person with their personal apologies the day the Government of Canada apologized to the Aboriginal Community for the process known as "residential schools". I am also grateful that the apology was made in a public forum.**

**I watched the event unfold on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in the staff lounge at my place of employment with a few of my professional peers. I was the only aboriginal in attendance as I am the only self-identified aboriginal in my workplace. It brought memories of the pains and hurts endured by my parents – pains and hurts that were forced on them and on their brothers and sisters. It brought memories of the horrific stories they told in our healing circles. The pain and the fear that healing circles of other victims of the residential schools that I have been involved with echoed and resonated. Tears as words were spoken of what had been done, what had been ordered, what had been directed by Church and State....Tears for the years and years of denial, tears for the years and years of silence....**

**We have a century-plus experience of dealing with residential schools and five centuries-plus experience of dealing with colonialism, the sword of the predator that slashes and tears at our soul....the meal that lasts and lasts. Some genocide is sterile and clean; some is ugly and mean.**

**After five centuries-plus what remains....Our relationship with the Creator remains....Our respect and relationship with Our Mother the Earth remains....Our traditional teachings and most of our languages remain....Our spirit and our culture remain....and because of that we, as human beings, remain. We, as people, have had to deal with this all alone. By ourselves, we have struggled and endured.**

**For these reasons we have a trust issue with institutional government and its agents. Today we look at a future that ensures we no longer will be in this alone. We will trust your words again, not because of who *you* are, but because of who *we* are. We hope that you will treat your words with respect and afford us the same.**

**This was very emotional for me and all my aboriginal brothers and sisters that I talked to, on that day and every day since. There were many who reached out to one another to share their thoughts, their hopes, their wishes and their doubt. There is pain, there is anger and mistrust out there. To this day, I am still very emotional about the events of June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.**

**For as long as I can remember, in my Circle and the Circles with the People of Turtle Island, we have been asking for such an event. It is in our teachings that healing can happen in the absence of an apology from the perpetrator. We are taught in our culture to look inward to see what part we own and deal with that -- and then give the rest to whoever owns it for them to deal with. This hurt, this fear, this pain, however, is different. We have had to endure it over seven generations; for over a century we have been held in its shadow. We continue in that shadow today, it remains to be seen if that shadow will lift in the future and the days, months and years that follow will prove if this apology is sincere and real.**

**Generational Loss is far more difficult to recover from. We have to unlearn the pain and the hurt, unlearn the fear of oppression affecting us because of how we look...how we think....how we speak....and how we talk to our Creator. I would ask anyone who is not of aboriginal ancestry to take a good look at their children, their family and put them into this picture....How could you protect them? How could you shield them from this pain if they were forced to endure this scenario?**

**We have always been a proud People and we have always been respectful of all things in Creation. We trust, as our culture teaches us, until we are shown beyond a reasonable doubt that those we trust are not worthy of that trust. It is with hope that we again offer this trust in the words of condolence and the asking for forgiveness that were spoken publicly several days ago.**

**IN PEACE,  
TO ALL MY RELATIONS,**

**WUT-TUN-NEE (Tim Brown, Chair, Aboriginal Circle)**

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