Hamilton's Rabbis' Statement of Solidarity with the First Nations on the discovery of the remains of the 215 Indigenous children, victims of the Kamloops Indian Residential School

יום שני כ׳ בסיון תשפ״א
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Along with all other Canadians, Hamilton's Jewish community reacts with horror at the discovery of the remains of 215 children buried in unmarked graves on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, announced a few days ago.

The Jewish community remembers only too well the *en masse* forced removals and displacement of our children from their parents and families, as well as the inhumane conditions in which these children were kept until they met untimely, violent deaths and were buried in unmarked graves, unreported.

Our people were killed in the name of enlightenment as the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, not at all unlike the Indian Problem spoken of by the Canadian, Duncan Campbell Scott, who ran the residential school system from 1913 to 1932. His stated goal was "to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department..."[1]

We similarly cannot forget the many centuries of attempts of the Catholic Church to forcibly convert us and our children to Christianity and to eradicate our religion, heritage and culture, identical to the self-stated goals of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, who ran Canada's residential schools designed to "Christianize and Civilize"[2] the Indigenous peoples, to make them "intellectually, morally and religiously elevated" and not allow them to "perpetuate the manners and customs of their ancestors".[3]

It is recognized that well over 4100 Indigenous children died at Canada's residential schools. It is well that Canada is finally taking responsibility for its injustices, yet this recognition comes much too late. In keeping with the spirit and intent of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the responsible authorities ***must*** examine each and every residential school site, and the identities of the children must be confirmed. We also still wait for the Church to accept responsibility for its large part in it. Regardless, nothing will ever undo the horrors.

Our own tradition teaches that every life lost is an entire world lost,[4] and today we join others in Canada, bitterly crying and solemnly mourning for each and every one of these 215 newly discovered lost worlds.

We will not ignore the sordid history of Canada's founding. We recognize, honour and respect the First Nations who are the traditional stewards of the land on which we are fortunate to make our homes today. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live with them and learn from them, and to work in their community, on this territory. And we will continue to pray for peace and respect between all peoples and cultures.

Rabbi Jordan Cohen
Temple Anshe Sholom

Rabbi Daniel Green
Adas Israel Congregation

Rabbi Hillel Lavery-Yisraëli
Beth Jacob Synagogue

Rabbi Aaron Selevan
Shalom Village

1 https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/historical-background/until-there-not-single-indian-canada
2 https://prism.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/26788/1/24555Pettit.pdf
3 https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/chapter-3/role-churches
4 Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:5.