



**Servicio Internacional Cristiano de Solidaridad  
Con los pueblos de América Latina  
"Oscar Arnulfo Romero"**

Carrera 27A No 40A -68 Bogotá, D.C

Teléfono (57) 6017113613

Correo Electrónico: [secretaria@sicsal.net](mailto:secretaria@sicsal.net) Web: [www.sicsal.net](http://www.sicsal.net)

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**SICSAL statement on the visit of Pope Francis to Canada,  
from July 24 to 30, 2022**

As SICSAL we celebrate the "penitential pilgrimage...in the name of Jesus" of Pope Francis to Canada and the request for forgiveness that he will make for the responsibility of the Church in the case of indigenous children forced to live in boarding schools, a request that joins the acknowledgment of responsibility and the request for forgiveness to the original peoples of all America, during his visit in 2015 in Bolivia. Likewise, we join the claim for Truth, Justice and Comprehensive Reparation made by the original peoples of Canada.

The request for forgiveness that Pope Francis will be making, is an example that the bishops of the countries of the Americas must follow, due to the involvement of members of the Catholic Church in grave events of the past. This penitential attitude will undoubtedly contribute to the collective reconciliation of all our nations.

The history of the construction of the country that is now known as Canada has, at its roots, the destruction of the communities of the original peoples who for millennia have lived in the diverse ecosystems of the continent: the forests, the prairies, the mountainous areas and the oceanic coasts. From the 17th century, with the arrival in the north of the English and French invaders, an unstoppable campaign of destruction began from the east, marching like a wave of terror towards the Pacific coast at the end of the 18th century. The theft of land, the prohibition of cultural practices, the introduction of plagues, mainly smallpox, and the military extermination of the communities that resisted, ended at the end of the 19th century with a subjugated population, but that persisted in its resistance.

At the end of this campaign of extermination, as a genocidal policy aimed at the economic benefit of taking over the lands of others and facilitated by racism, the Canadian Government organized "residential schools" as an instrument of control and annihilation of identities, communities, families and cultures. Through the Mounted Police, boys and girls were separated from their families from the age of 4 or 5, to intern them in these schools, often located far from their communities.

In these schools, organized by the Federal Government but run by the churches – Anglican, Methodist, Catholic and Presbyterian – inadequate state funding caused malnutrition, which along with administrators' decisions to ignore warnings from health experts about the unsanitary conditions conducive to the easy transmission of respiratory diseases, caused children, already malnourished, to have little chance of surviving common infections such as tuberculosis and pneumonia. In addition, children were subjected to systematic abuses of cultural, emotional, physical and sexual forms. In total, between 1831 and 1996 some 150,000 children passed through these schools. An unknown number of them died whilst confined there, and were buried in gravesites adjacent to the schools, which now remain without markings or identification.

In 2006, the survivors of the residential schools reached a settlement with the Federal Government and the Churches on a reparation agreement, which, in addition to compensation payments, defined the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that compiled the testimonies of the

survivors and conducted a series of national meetings from 2008 to 2012, culminating in 2015 with the publication of its six-volume final report, along with the document titled "Calls to Action" - a synthesis of its 94 recommendations.

The United Church, which was formed a century ago by the union of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, and the Anglican Church have carried out various acts of reconciliation, including acts of apologizing, listening and healing, and have compensated the victimized communities. .

In the opinion of the survivors, the Vatican and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops have not yet participated fully in the necessary processes of truth and justice.

However, in April of this year, with the visit to the Vatican of several leaders of the three groups of indigenous peoples: the First Nations, the Métis (people with European-indigenous descent) and the Inuit, an acknowledgment of responsibility was begun by Pope Francis.

The Pope extolled during this visit:

*"Your care for the land, which you see not as a resource to be exploited, but as a gift of heaven. For you, the land preserves the memory of your ancestors who rest there; it is a vital setting making it possible to see each individual's life as part of a greater web of relationships, with the Creator, with the human community, with all living species and with the earth, our common home."* (Vatican, 1st April 2022)

As well, Pope Francis promised to visit Canadian territory to continue this healing process. Hence his upcoming visit commencing on 24th July.

Leaders of Indigenous communities have expressed their gratitude for the Pope's words and, at the same time, wish to be heard on the following proposals for reconciliation:

1. That the Catholic Church disclose from its files any additional documentation about the children.
2. That documentation on the abusers be disclosed, and that there be justice in case they are alive.
3. That support be offered to exhume gravesites where children are buried without proper documentation.
4. The revocation of the Papal Bulls of 1455 and 1493, which contain the "doctrine of discovery" and the proclamation of "terra nullius" ("land without owner") to the territories not yet "discovered" by European adventurers.
5. That the Pope apologize recognizing the role of the Catholic Church in the destruction of communities.

We make our own, these demands of the original peoples, and at the same time we ask, as Pope Francis does, that we all pray for the fruits of this "penitential pilgrimage":

*Dear brothers and sisters of Canada, as you know, I will come among you especially in the name of Jesus to meet and embrace the indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, in Canada, many Christians, including some members of religious institutes, have contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation that, in the past, have severely harmed native communities in various ways. For this reason, I recently received some groups in the Vatican, representatives of indigenous peoples, to whom I expressed my sorrow and solidarity for the harm they have suffered. And now I am about to embark on a penitential pilgrimage, which I hope, with God's grace, will contribute to the journey of healing and reconciliation already undertaken. I thank you in advance for all the work of preparation and for the welcome you will give me. Thank you*

*all! And I ask you to please accompany me in prayer. (Pope Francis, Angelus Prayer, 17th July 2022)*

International Christian Service of Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America,  
18th July 2022

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