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Statement of recognition and apology to the Dakota-Lakota First Nations

Apology to 9 Dakota-Lakota First Nations communities for longstanding injustice.

Context

At a historic gathering held on July 15, 2024, the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, delivered a formal statement of recognition and apology on behalf of the Government of Canada to the 9 Dakota and Lakota First Nations in Canada and their members.

Speaking notes for the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree

Dakota and Lakota Elders, Chiefs and Councillors, and to all community members who are both here and watching back in their communities:

It is both my duty, and my humble honour, to be here today to turn the page on a dark chapter of our national story and to formally recognize and acknowledge the Dakota and Lakota as "Aboriginal peoples of Canada",

with constitutionally protected rights, and forming an essential part of our national story and fabric.

Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, we seek to begin to mend this injustice with three simple words: we are sorry.

We acknowledge that you have been treated as "second-class First Nations" and strangers here on your own land in Canada – a Canada that you helped defend, build and develop. We recognize the hurt that this has caused generations of your citizens. We hope, today, that we can remove this stain and begin the important work of healing.

As part of the peoples of Oceti Sakowin, the Dakota and Lakota have, since time immemorial, used, lived on, occupied, and drawn life, spirituality and culture from the vast territories within what is now the US and Canada.

When the French and the English left their homelands and came to yours, they were welcomed by the Dakota and Lakota as guests, as partners in lucrative trade and, above all, later as allies. Indeed, I am told that the words "Dakota" and "Lakota" mean "ally" or "friends" in your languages. And it is fitting. The Dakota and Lakota were steadfast allies with the Crown. Their practice of allyship brought with it economic growth, peace and security for all.

Your ancestors fought valiantly and with great distinction alongside and as an ally with the Crown in many conflicts that have marked our shared history.

But it was perhaps during the War of 1812 that your allyship, your honour, and your valour shone the brightest and, despite this, you were later disregarded and betrayed.

Success would not have been possible, without the bravery and skill of the Crown's Indigenous allies—including warriors from your Nations—who answered the plea to help to defend what is now Canada.

During the Bicentennial commemorations of the War of 1812, Canada presented new War of 1812 medals to recognize the critical role of Indigenous Peoples, including the Dakota Nations, in defending what is today Canada.

Your Nations' participation in the War of 1812 resulted in a promise of assistance from the British Crown in your dealings with the Americans should you need it. That promise was soon broken in the negotiations that concluded with the Treaty of Ghent of 1815, ending the War of 1812. Indigenous Peoples, it has been said, won the War of 1812, but lost the peace that followed.

This sense of betrayal only deepened when, in the 1860s, certain of your ancestors journeyed back north to the lands that now form part of Canada and sought recognition as partners. You presented your flags and medals to officials as woven and cast reminders of your long history of allyship with the Crown. Yet, you were not welcomed by the Crown as cherished allies, but as "American Indian" refugees. This was wrong. You were allies. You were not refugees.

After the Lakota had defeated the American army at the battle of the Greasy Grass, they turned to their home in the north. The Lakota called upon Canada to recognize them as subjects of the Queen, but Canada regarded them as American Indians, wrongfully tarnishing the relationship between the Crown and the Lakota.

The impacts and the harms went beyond the enormous disrespect and dishonour that this represented. It resulted in your Nations being allotted reserve lands that were and that remain today smaller in size than those extended to other First Nations who adhered to Treaty. Indeed, the meagre lands set aside for you were a fraction of what Canada eagerly made available to non-Indigenous settlers of the Prairies.

Your leaders were present at the negotiation of numbered Treaties, but you were excluded from Treaty making. You did not receive the promises that came with Treaties, such as annuity payments and land allocations. As Canadians, we must all understand that, as a result, you did not relinquish any of your rights.

For over 150 years, you have been denied the recognition and rights as Aboriginal peoples that were owed to you. But you were not spared the indignities and practices of assimilation that the Canadian government inflicted on Indigenous Peoples: the reserve system, the pass system, the *Indian Act*, the theft of your children and the assault on your culture and traditions through residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, the child welfare system, and other devastating and racist policies that have harmed Indigenous Peoples in Canada and excluded your Nations from sharing in Canada's growing economic wealth. You have shared in this experience, yet have been denied the constitutional recognition and protection that other Indigenous groups have.

There is no way to undo the years of collective trauma your people and Nations endure to this day. You have lived, breathed and felt the effects of the Canadian Government's actions and indifference for over 150 years.

Yet, despite the racism, discrimination, social and economic exclusion and lingering harms of colonialism, your dignity as Indigenous Peoples remains unbroken. Never forgetting or relenting, and guided by your ancestors, you

have proudly endured, drawing strength from your rich history, language and culture. You have never stopped fighting for recognition as Aboriginal Peoples of Canada with a unique relationship with the Crown built on our longstanding ties of friendship and as allies.

You have continued to breathe so much into the social, cultural, spiritual and economic life of this country. Your perseverance, strength, resilience, enduring honour and unbroken faith is a testament to the very things that have made you such indispensable allies and contributors to Canada.

We are sorry, and deeply remorseful that it has taken too long for us to acknowledge and apologize for our actions. Today, as we seek to open a new chapter, we are mindful that so many of your leaders and members who fought for this day are not here to see it. We honour and pay special tribute to them.

Acknowledging with honesty and humility, our shared, and at times difficult, history is essential for us to move forward in partnership and in a spirit of reconciliation. But words, while important, are hollow if not followed by action. If nothing else, our shared history is a testament to this harsh reality. If today is to mean anything at all, it must lay a foundation upon which the Government of Canada and the Dakota and Lakota peoples can rebuild our Nation-to-Nation relationships, on the principles of respect for rights, cooperation, partnership, and trust – the very principles that formed the original basis for our relationship. And so this Government will work in partnership with the Dakota and Lakota Nations to co-develop, at long last, treaties and agreements that affirm your rightful place as Aboriginal peoples of Canada in the constitutional framework.

And, from this day forward, let no one repeat the hurtful claim that this country, this Canada that you helped defend and shape, and that you continue to contribute so much to, is not your home. We stand with you to

say, at long last, what you have never forgotten. That you are not strangers here; that you are indeed Aboriginal peoples of Canada; that you are home.

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