

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Statement by New Democratic Leader Jack Layton on the National Day of Reconciliation for
Canada's First Nations**

On this day one year ago the Parliament of Canada made an historic apology to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people for their treatment in residential schools. Powerful words were spoken in the House of Commons – and accepted with a generous and open heart by those First Nations who heard them.

Today we renew that spirit of reconciliation, and in that renewal we must reaffirm our commitment to addressing the terrible inequality faced by First Nations communities. An apology is an important first step, but cannot alone reverse one hundred and fifty years of discrimination and neglect.

Thousands of First Nations children are still without schools, clean water, affordable food, good health care and basic housing. Such injustice is a stain on the conscience of all Canadians.

We must provide the funding and support to First Nations for better health care, education and healthy living, coupled with greater recognition of the rights necessary to making critical decisions within the community. We must work harder to value the aboriginal history of Canada and all that First Nations peoples have contributed to our culture.

It was in this spirit that Jean Crowder, the New Democrat critic for First Nations, Inuit and Métis affairs, passed a motion last week – with unanimous consent – that recognised June as National Aboriginal History Month. This is one more step in the process of reconciliation, a step towards ensuring all Canadians celebrate and acknowledge the diverse history of our First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

On this day, I urge all of you here to find your way to celebrate and honour this month – and to encourage others to do the same.

And while today we renew the spirit of reconciliation, we also recognise that the hard work of ending inequality for First Nations still lies ahead.

Forwarded by the office of MP Irene Mathyssen,
Shawn Lewis
Assistant to Irene Mathyssen
Member of Parliament for London-Fanshawe
NDP Critic for the Status of Women
t: 519-685-4745
f: 519-685-1462
www.irenemathyssen.ca