

Check Against Delivery

“Where Are the Children?” – an exhibition launch

*A speech, delivered by Georges Erasmus,
President, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation*

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
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Honourable Premier, Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I acknowledge the Survivors of residential school, and I thank you for your presence.

The exhibition *Where Are The Children?* was first launched over a year ago, in June 2002, at the National Archives of Canada.

It is the product of a collaboration between the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the National Archives of Canada, and the Legacy of Hope Foundation.

Jeff Thomas, guest curator at the National Archives, undertook the project as an attempt to present portraits of courage, strength, and determination.

Although the Indian Residential School System was designed to assimilate Aboriginal peoples against their will, not only have we resisted – we have made, and continue to make, valuable contributions to our communities.

In the work of healing, in the raising up of our future leaders, and in our relations with the Government of Canada, we are again looking seven generations ahead.

It has not been an easy journey.

Survivors of Indian residential school trauma have painful recollections.

Some have begun their healing, others are yet to begin.

I acknowledge their strength – their determination to face the truth and to end the cycle of abuse.

People of courage are the wealth of our nations. May this exhibit contribute to their healing by showing their resilience.

Over 130,000 people have now viewed "*Where Are The Children?*".

Some of them have seen for the first time what Survivors of residential school abuses have never forgotten: the faces of children systematically oppressed, and systematically alienated from their own identities.

For these pictures give us a glimpse, not only of the children, but also of the assumptions of the people who took them from their homes to indoctrinate them in the ways of a supposedly superior culture.

We are all familiar with the results.

The intergenerational legacy of forced assimilation in the residential school system is still with us.

Healing begins when we put an end to the silence – when our stories are again shared among us.

May this exhibition contribute to the healing and reconciliation of our peoples, by moving those who need to speak to speaking, and those who need to listen to listening.

The Legacy of Hope Foundation was established to carry on the long-term work of healing begun in 1998 by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Healing is a commitment that will require time.

And so, we will continue to promote awareness of the residential school system.

We will continue to support community-based healing and increased understanding of the historical trauma suffered by Aboriginal people.

Although the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was given an eleven-year mandate, ending in 2009, the healing has only begun, and it must go forward.

This exhibition is part of an effort to cultivate the awareness and understanding that an adequate, long-term commitment will require.

I thank our partners in this project for their invaluable help in creating this exhibition.

And I thank you for listening.

Masi.