

Dear Carolyn Bennett,

Many Canadians often view poverty is a problem distant from our country, a problem that is hardly an issue in our own country. Unfortunately, this belief would be incorrect. The truth is there is much poverty right here in Canada. The main victims of this poverty being those who inhabited our land first; the Indigenous Peoples. The heartbreaking truth is that 50% of aboriginal children are growing up in poverty. Food insecurity amongst Aboriginals ranges from 21-83% where as for the rest of Canadians it is about 3-9%. Only about 39% of Aboriginals complete high school compared to the 87% of non-Aboriginal Canadians, and by the age of 24 Aboriginals are twice as likely to be unemployed. Action needs to be taken to solve this issue. It is the Canadian government's responsibility to take this action as it is not the Aboriginal communities fault for their own suffering.

It all starts long ago when European settlers first came to Canada. They were eager to conduct a fur trade with the First Nation peoples of Canada. The Aboriginals traded their furs with the Europeans in return for goods such as knives, axes, pots, muskets, guns, ect.. These new technologies drastically changed the First Nation's way of life and survival. Eventually the demand for furs in Europe stopped and the Europeans were no longer interested in trading with the First Nations. The First Nations survival however had now become very dependent on the tools they received from the Europeans. Vulnerable and reliant, the First Nations were left sustainable to abuse from Europeans.

More and more settlers came to Canada, the First Nations had no choice but to sign treaties and give up land in order to receive aid from the Europeans. The treaties did ensure First Nations would be get their fair share of the land but these promises were soon broken. Eventually the Aboriginals were forced to sign the Indian Act. The Indian Act made the Aboriginals wards of the state and forced them onto the small set aside pieces of land known as reserves. Many Aboriginals still live on these today.

Eventually the Government decided the Aboriginals should entirely forget their culture, beliefs, and way of life to assimilate into the new mainstream culture. Thus came Residential Schools. To this day known as one of the Canadian Government's biggest mistakes Residential Schools forced Aboriginal children to leave their families for years at a time to attend. These schools focused on teaching religion and were meant to integrate the Aboriginals into the dominant British culture and society. Children as young as 3-16 years old were taken from their families and many did not return home or see their families for years at a time. There were about 130 of these schools across Canada and approximately 7100 children attended these schools each year. These schools used many unqualified teachers who were to teach the children not to use their native language or practice their cultures beliefs and traditions. Within these schools much verbal, physical, and even sexual abuse took place. Accounts of students having needles put through their tongues for speaking their languages, being severely beaten for practicing their traditions, or being forced to eat rotten foods are told. A study found that 35-60% of children died within five years of starting at a residential school. These schools resulted in a significant loss of Aboriginal culture, language, and family connection. As well as high rates of depression, alcohol and drug abuse, outrages of violence, and other mental health issues.

The effects of Residential Schools had an intergenerational impact on the Aboriginal Peoples and even today, long after the last school was closed, the Aboriginal population suffers from their trauma. The children coming out of the schools never learned a family connection, intimacy, or how to raise a child of their own. They now felt out of place both with their families and in the mainstream culture. The children of these people were left with the same problems as their parents as they looked to them as role models, along with their children and so on. The Aboriginal's abundant amount of mental health and social issues leaves them very prone to poverty. They have extreme difficulty getting a proper education, and later employment. The sad truth is the Canadian Government is to blame for these tremendous poverty rates.

So how can the Canadian Government solve the issue they have created? To begin awareness needs to be spread about the issue so people stop blaming Aboriginals for their own suffering. Rehab and help centers made specifically for Aboriginals will make the people feel more secure about going to get help. Furthermore, helping the youth is the key to the solving the problem. Ensuring Aboriginal youth gets the proper education opportunities and in stable homes will make them more likely to get steady jobs in their future. It is important to grow industries in First Nation communities. Community projects such as logging, mining, fishing, and wineries are a great way to bring wealth and prosperity to Aboriginal communities. Even funding First Nation businesses all ready in action is a great way to encourage economic growth. Finally, it must be ensured all Aboriginal communities have roads to access them. Certifying access to the communities will allow other Canadians to come and support the growing businesses.

As a Canadian citizen I care about the Canadian Aboriginal community and strongly believe the government needs to take bigger steps in the right direction towards reconciliation with the Aboriginal community. The poverty must end, without your help it will not. Action must to be taken.