



22521 ISLAND ROAD · PORT PERRY, ON · L9L 1B6 · TEL: 905-985-3337 · FAX: 905-985-8828 ·

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National Indigenous Peoples Day - June 21, 2021

National Indigenous Peoples Day is a day that is earmarked to celebrate the first peoples of this country. Speaking broadly, it is a day about making sure that our legacy is observed and serves to celebrate Indigenous contributions to Canada.

The initial contribution of single most importance was the sharing of the land and resources in what we now know as Canada. This observation forms the basis of all land acknowledgements. It is widely accepted that the original settlers would have surely perished their first winter had the Indigenous peoples of this land not helped them survive through harsh climates. On this occasion, it is appropriate for us to reflect and appreciate the culture of the first peoples who opened their hearts, homes, and resources to so many.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is not about reparations. It is about making sure that we celebrate the resilience of Indigenous peoples despite Canada's history. The thing is, we cannot talk about resilience without understanding the baggage that we carry as a Nation. Many Indigenous people and communities were slaughtered, enslaved, jailed, put into residential schools, or stolen into the child welfare system, all while corralling the rest of our people into reserves through the force of the federal *Indian Act* which still governs us today. But there is hope. Many Canadians are more readily identifying the racism that exists within Canadian borders and beyond. Canada eventually chose to celebrate our Indigenous Veterans as Canadian heroes too. Canadians are now alive to the injustices committed against the Indigenous community, which is an obvious starting point towards a better path forward. Indigenous communities are weaving together threads of family. Our communities are healing. Our children are proud of their Indigeneity after generations of needing or wanting to hide it. Once designed as concentration camps, our people went ahead and turned reservations into communities. This is the resilience of which we speak.

Today we wear our hearts on our sleeves as a Nation, particularly as we reflect upon the recent discovery of the 215 children lost at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, but also so many others lost in the wake of the Residential Schools Era. This is an important process for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. If we can allow



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ourselves to acknowledge our painful past and sit together in the discomfort, we may just emerge a little wiser to each other's point of view. We can let it permeate that everybody is on Indigenous land. Indigenous peoples will keep on being here, regardless of what framework is set up, regardless of whoever is or is perceived as being "in control." If we allow ourselves to just 'go there' – we will emerge kinder to how we address the fallout of the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples & communities continue to work through to this day.

Indigenous resilience could be viewed through the lens of love. Loving ourselves again. Loving our families. Loving our communities. Loving our culture. Loving the language that we work to reclaim. Much like the immigrant community in Canada, the Indigenous community entails a diverse set of voices and experiences based on diverse cultures. We must love this too, respecting that we were never one homogenous voice. Today we recognize the amazing contributions of all Indigenous peoples and how their rich cultures have been a necessary condition to the creation of Canada. We are Canada's foundation.

We are in some of the most difficult and challenging times in recent history. Racism, violence against women & girls, a lack of clean drinking water, and climate change are just a sample of the prevalent issues that require a collective Canadian response. The pandemic will create much discussion in the way of recovery, but it remains in all our interests to reconsider our perspectives. If the pandemic has reminded us of anything, it is the first lesson shared when settlers came to this beautiful place: Humans belong to the World; the World does not belong to Humans. On this National Indigenous Peoples Day, we celebrate that the original stewards are still here, are healing, and are now being heard, once again being asked to share our knowledge with the world. Our collective foundation is stronger.

Miigwech for your time and attention in observing National Indigenous Peoples Day.
Baamaapii!

Chief & Council of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation