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December 16, 2015

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

RE: Call for Action for ‘60s Scoop Adoptees and Foster Care Adults

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

The authors of this letter, who are members of the Indigenous Adoptee community located in Ottawa, are writing to impress upon you and your government the need for an immediate call to action to address healing, reconciliation and recognition of past policies related to the Native Child Welfare policies, commonly referred to as the “60s Scoop”.

We commend the new Liberal government’s commitment: (<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-indigenous-and-northern-affairs-mandate-letter>)

“To support the work of reconciliation, and continue the necessary process of truth telling and healing, work with provinces and territories, and with First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit, to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

“Work with residential school survivors, First Nations, Métis Nation, Inuit communities, provinces, territories, and educators to incorporate Aboriginal and treaty rights, residential schools, and Indigenous contributions into school curricula.”

The term ‘60s Scoop refers to the mass adoption of Indigenous children in Canada between the 1960s and the mid-1980s. This term was coined by Patrick Johnston (1983) in the Native Children and Child Welfare System report. Johnston observed that adoption was the mechanism used to address problematic child welfare issues.

To date, ‘60s Scoop adoptions have been completely left out of the conversations needed for reconciliation and healing from trauma inflicted upon Indigenous families. These colonial child welfare policies have contributed tremendously to the high numbers of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, a crisis Canada is facing today. As an extension of the Residential School assimilation policies to “**take the Indian out of the child**” there are thousands of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in foster care due to the fallout from the horrors of the Residential School era. (The State began adopting thousands of children like us out to non -Indigenous households. In some cases Indigenous children were solicited in catalogs and newspapers as unwanted children who needed good households.)

We know now that the State deliberately displaced us from our families and territories to assimilate us and disconnect us from our land, ceremonies and language as reported in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report.

Most adoptees grew up not knowing they were benefactors to Treaties or to Indigenous programs and services like education or health benefits. Most have struggled with tremendous loss of identity, alienation and internalized racism along with horrific physical and sexual abuse trauma endured at the hand of abusive adoptive parents.

The '60's scoop adoptees are the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (men and boys), those experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, epidemic of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, addictions, incarceration and suicide. We are struggling not only to heal ourselves but to heal for our children and our grandchildren. Although there has been some discussion at the First Minister's table for the establishment of a group to study this issue and a subsequent apology from Manitoba, we need more health support, awareness and accountability now when we access services. We need even more support from our Indigenous communities to understand what it is like to come home and how to feel accepted and acknowledged by family and community.

At a recent Presentation Summary related to a case study titled, "*Policy Analysis of The Sixties Scoop era of Canadian Aboriginal History For A Hidden Generation*" (2015) by the PAPM 4000 class at the Carleton University, students explored the history of the '60s Scoop in Ontario. The students produced a policy document with an evaluation of the outcomes. We learnt that under a government led by Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King, that in,

"...1946 a parliamentary committee was established to examine proposals and application of the Indian Act. The examination carried out by the parliamentary committee led to the amendment of the Indian Act in 1951. The amendment included s.88 which legally enabled provincial legislation to be imposed on indigenous communities and reserves. Although s.88 does include restrictions to the application of provincial legislation on indigenous communities, it enables provincial governments to administer provincial child welfare and family services to indigenous peoples formerly outside their constitutional jurisdiction. By 1959 nearly 1% of all Canadian youth considered wards of the state were of indigenous heritage. Within a decade the number of indigenous youth who were forcibly removed from their families by child welfare and family services across Canada rose to nearly 40% by the late 1960s. This is despite the fact that at the time indigenous youth only made up a total of 4% of Canada's population..."

As a result of these decisions, Indigenous children were apprehended from their homes and communities without the knowledge or consent of their parents. A high level of Indigenous children, who are now adults, were apprehended and adopted primarily into non-Indigenous homes in Canada, the United States and overseas, "... [T]he Sixties Scoop was a by-product of the interaction between key economic policies, an assimilationist agenda, an untried child welfare bureaucracy, and a very large socio-economic and political divide between Aboriginal people vulnerable to bureaucratic actions and interventions..." (Raven Sinclair, 24).

As a consequence of what Canada did or did not do, Indigenous children lost their cultural identity and this has caused them much pain and suffering. Over the past few years we have come across many adoptees who expressed concerns and hardship when accessing their adoption details. Much of the documentation such as birth certificates has been altered which impedes their ability to repatriate with their families or successfully access their Treaty Status and Métis benefits. The altering of documents is very troublesome since it erases their identity and family lineage as First Nations, Métis or Inuit children, especially for those that live outside the country.

We believe that these acts are "*cultural genocide*" as defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission this summer. We would even go further to describe these acts as "*genocide*" as declared in Article 7, s.2 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

As a group of adoptees in Ottawa, we have been working to heal ourselves by hosting two successful national gatherings (2014 and 2015) which garnered national media attention both nationally and internationally. At these events we continually heard Indigenous adoptees and their families voice their need to be heard, to be healed and to see justice to those that perpetrated the many injustices. At the Assembly of First Nations meeting held in Ottawa last week, we heard the willingness of your government to begin looking into the Native Child Welfare legislation. We both attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report event this week and were encouraged to hear your government's commitment to implementing the calls to action. We feel this is a great start but it is important to recognize and right the wrongs of the past.

Prime Minister Trudeau, although we don't speak for all adoptees, we firmly believe that supporting adoptees and their families by assisting their healing needs, recognizing the wrongs and applying the right reparations package for adoptees and their parents is paramount and is the right thing to do. In the latter, we are concerned about the class action suits happening in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba; we feel that this may be the wrong approach. We prefer to see healing supports come first but if a reparation package is realized it should go directly to the adoptees and their families through bi-lateral negotiations with the government instead of going through the courts.

In stating that, we would like to request a meeting with you, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and the Minister of Justice as soon as possible. This meeting would be the first of many to educate you and your colleagues on the current activities we have taken. We would also like to discuss our vision of setting up national roundtables to begin affirming the needs of all '60s Scoop Indigenous adoptees and their families and to create a Healing, Cultural and Returning Home Strategy because it is adoptees that should set the tone and future direction on this very important subject matter. We request this meeting because we are encouraged to hear you personally commit your government's willingness to reset the relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In 2016, we will be launching the documentary titled, "*A Hidden Generation*", that looks into the effects caused by the '60s Scoop and what the community is doing to learn and heal from it. This tool will be used to educate Canadians and the world. We hope you will join us when we launch it.

In closing, we were children when this happened. What continues to resonate in our minds is something that we heard this summer from a mother who lost two of her children. Could you and Sophie imagine, walking out of the hospital empty handed without your child and not know why?

We look forward to hearing from you directly.

All Our Relations,

Duane Morrisseau-Beck and Colleen Cardinal
Indigenous Adoptees- Ottawa

cc: Indigenous Adoptee Community- Ottawa
Board of Directors, Manitoba Indigenous Adoptees Coalition
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs
The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
Marie-Claude Landry, Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission
National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations

President Clément Chartier, Métis National Council and Provincial Affiliates
President Melanie Omeniho, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (Women of the Métis Nation)
National Chief Dwight Dorey, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
President Dawn Harvard Ph.D., Native Women's Association of Canada
President Nelson Mayer, National Association of Friendship Centres
Executive Director, Jennifer Henry, KAIROS-Ottawa
Executive of the General Council, General Secretary, United Church of Canada
Chiefs of Ontario
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
Confederacy Of Treaty Six First Nations
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
Valerie Andrews, Origins Canada