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COWESSESS FIRST NATION WELCOMES AGREEMENT BETWEEN CANADA AND THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION TO TRANSITION RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL RECORDS

(Cowessess First Nation) – The MOU signed today between Crown Indigenous Relations and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation is a positive step towards the gravesite project undertaken by Cowessess First Nation.

“This news today assures the Government of Canada will stand beside Cowessess First Nation as we begin collecting records held by Government,” said Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess First Nation.

From 1898 to the early 1970s, the Roman Catholic Church oversaw the community gravesite. In early June 2021, Cowessess First Nation formed a technical and research team that identified 751 unmarked graves at the site of the Marieval Residential School using ground penetrating radar. The research team was tasked with locating records to validate the names of unmarked graves. The Roman Catholic Church have cooperated with the team and recently visited the records center where Marieval Residential School records are housed.

“In June 2021, Cowessess First Nation shared the validation of unmarked graves at the site of the former Marieval Residential School. The 751 unmarked graves have been identified as both former children who attended the Residential School and locals, both First Nation and non-First Nations. The research team has been active in identifying every child, Roman Catholic Church official (fathers, sisters, administration) and specialists. Once we do our chronological research, we will be able to share the true story by identifying which children did not make it home. The Government of Canada has invested in our approach and with the releasing records of that will help Cowessess First Nation obtain our end goal,” says Chief Delorme.

In November 2021, the Government of Canada and Cowessess First Nation signed a \$700,000 agreement to invest in Cowessess First Nation to identify the unmarked graves. Cowessess First Nation research team have been working towards this end goal.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

June 2021: Chief Delorme and Knowledge Keeper, Florence Sparvier, share the validation of unmarked graves at the former Marieval Residential School.

June to September 2021: Residential School survivors and their families, numerous Canadians and international visitors travel to the former site.

July 2021: Cowessess First Nation finalizes a research team to begin collecting data on the Marieval Residential School.

September 30th, 2021: Day of Gathering happens at the former Marieval Residential School site.

November 2021: Government of Canada and Cowessess First Nation sign an agreement to invest in Cowessess First Nation's three year-plan with the end goal of identifying unmarked graves.

December 2021: Cowessess First Nation research team begin identifying records in one of the Roman Catholic records sites.

January 2022: Government of Canada and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation sign an agreement for the Government of Canada to release Marieval Residential School records.

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