

Government of Alberta

Sixties Scoop Apology

On May 28, 2018, Premier Rachel Notley delivered an historic apology to survivors of the Sixties Scoop, their families and communities. The day began with a pipe ceremony and grand entry into the Alberta legislature. Survivors, their families and leaders from Indigenous communities across Alberta gathered to witness Premier Notley offer an apology in the chamber of the legislature. Below is the transcript of the apology:

Premier Rachel Notley:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here today on the traditional territory of Treaty 6, and I'd also like to acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta who share a very deep connection with this land.

I rise today in the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

Before we begin, I'd like us all to take a moment and just look up.

When we speak about colonialism and its vestiges, when we speak about the need for truth and reconciliation here in Alberta and across Canada, when we speak about healing, we must remember always that we speak about people.

Above us today are survivors of the Sixties Scoop: women and men, children and grandchildren, parents and grandparents, all of them survivors.

As we speak today in their presence, we are mindful that their presence carries with it also a terrible absence; parents lost; children taken; families destroyed; cultures shamed, ignored, and forgotten; by force, a proud way of life taken away.

The decisions that led to that personal trauma: many of those decisions, Mr. Speaker, were made right here on this floor in this Chamber.

The Government of Alberta owes these people an apology, and today that's what we are here to do.

But for that apology to have the meaning that these women and men deserve, these women and men deserve to know that their experiences were heard and are heard and are understood as best we can.

These women and men deserve to know that we stand here today looking up at them not only with hearts of reconciliation but with eyes that see the wrongs of the past as clearly as we can.

So before we can offer our apology, please allow me to speak to the work done to make this apology meaningful for these brave women and men, because they deserve nothing less.

The Sixties Scoop is the colloquial name for the government practices perpetuated in Alberta and across Canada from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Indigenous children were taken from their birth families, from their communities, put in non-Indigenous homes, without meaningful steps, in some cases without any steps at all, to preserve their culture, their identity, their relationship with their community, and, even most importantly, with their family.

To speak of the Sixties Scoop in these terms is to speak merely of the broadest and the most impersonal strokes.

To appreciate the trauma these women and men lived through, we need to hear it from them in their voices, and that's what we set out to do.

Over 800 courageous survivors of the Sixties Scoop shared with us their heartbreaking experiences, and I want to thank each and every person who participated in that.

All of you who came forward and shared your experiences did so with courage beyond measure.

You didn't just share the trauma of what was done to you; you spoke truth to power.

You spoke truth to the same power, the same institution, and the government that inflicted this trauma on you in the first place.

So to all of you, thank you.

The stories that you, the survivors, shared with us are heartbreaking.

These stories transcend generations: children – kids, babies, toddlers, teens – ripped from your families; parents unable to see through the tears as they took your children away from you; grandparents forced aside as your families were destroyed.

We heard stories of how you were lied to and told that your families didn't want you or couldn't care for you.

We heard how many of you were never told where your children had gone, where your parents had gone, where your brothers or sisters had gone.

Many of you were placed into foster care, with no linkages to your culture, bounced from home to home, place to place, with no stability or sense of who you are and the proud place that you came from.

We also heard clearly that some of those foster homes were also not safe.

Many of you faced terrible abuse – physical abuse, sexual abuse, mental and emotional abuse – forced labour, starvation, and neglect.

A survivor shared this quote with us, and I want to share it today because I believe it reveals the horror and the tragedy of what was done to these children.

That person said: "I was abused in every home.

The worst part was that we actually had a family that loved us."

Many of you shared that even as children you contemplated suicide.

Those feelings were often compounded by the isolation that you experienced.

When you were placed in non-Indigenous homes and communities, the dominance of colonial thinking meant that you regularly faced racism and discrimination.

Some of you were forbidden to speak your own language, forced instead to speak English or French.

Many of you were not allowed to honour or express your culture.

Make no mistake.

The Sixties Scoop was an assault on Indigenous identity, your sense of self and who you are.

As a result, many of you never felt at home anywhere, not in the homes and communities where you were fostered or adopted and not even when you returned home.

One survivor remembered: "At 19 I went back to the reserve.

One minute I am white.

One minute I am red.

I never knew which side I belonged on."

Another said: "I lost my spirit.

It was taken away from me."

The impacts of these government actions are still felt by you and your families today.

The scars of this tragedy still linger, some as fresh as they were a generation ago.

Many of you told us that you still experience family dysfunction and difficult relationships as a result of what was done to you.

Some survivors shared that they never felt love during childhood.

One survivor said, "I couldn't understand what real love was."

Many of you struggle with self-identity due to losing your culture, your language, and the connection to your families.

Many of you spoke about ongoing challenges with government systems and education and police and justice.

When we look clearly at what was done to you, what we did to you, it is no wonder that it is so hard for so many of you to trust again.

Many survivors spoke about poor physical and mental health, about drug and alcohol addiction, about depression and suicide and early deaths amongst families and friends.

The legacy of residential schools was and is a constant shadow over your lives.

Many of you had parents and grandparents who were traumatized by residential schools.

These traumas were often passed on to you, and many survivors spoke of the ongoing trauma their parents experienced.

Many fear that they passed this trauma on to their children.

A survivor told us, "The cycle needs to stop," and we agree.

I ask again for the members of this Assembly to look up, to see these survivors, to honour them and their ancestors with our full attention.

To you, the survivors of the Sixties Scoop, to your children, to your parents, to the rest of your families, and to your communities, from me as Premier of Alberta, from all of us here as the elected representatives of the people of Alberta, and on behalf of the government of Alberta, we are sorry.

For the loss of families, of stability, of love, we are sorry.

For the loss of identity, of language and culture, we are sorry.

For the loneliness, the anger, the confusion, and the frustration, we are sorry.

For the government practice that left you Indigenous people estranged from your families and your communities and your history, we are sorry.

For this trauma, this pain, this suffering, alienation, and sadness, we are sorry.

To all of you, I am sorry.

In Cree the word is ni mihtâtam.
In Dene the word is bek'e nasdlí.

In Beaver the word is sekaa-tah.

In Nakota the word is wéčã ptač.

In Blackfoot the closest term is tsik skāp(h) tsap spinaa'n.

In Soto the closest term is gaween-ouchi-dahh-do-taw-naan.

In Michif the term is ni mihtatayn.

We are sorry.

For an apology to be worth anything, it must also carry with it a promise.

Here is my promise, our promise, to the survivors of the Sixties Scoop.

We will work with Indigenous communities, with each of you.

We will ensure that your perspectives, your desires, and your priorities for your families and communities are reflected in what we do going forward.

No one knows what Indigenous children and families need better than First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities.

We will honour that.

We will work together with you, your families, your elders, and your communities to correct historical injustices and find a path to true reconciliation between our government and Indigenous Albertans.

Together we can help heal the wounds of the past, together we can ensure that Indigenous children grow up happy and healthy and connected to their families, their communities, and their cultures, and together we will ensure that all Indigenous Albertans enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as every Albertan.

With all of this work we are not starting from a standstill.

The work that began with the Sixties Scoop consultation continues, and the relationship being built through those consultations, a relationship that we hope is a new and growing form of trust, will serve us well as we continue together down the path of reconciliation.

Honoured guests, Mr. Speaker, members of the Assembly, thank you for the privilege of speaking with you today and for the opportunity to express our deepest apologies for the government practice known as the Sixties Scoop.

Before I conclude, I do want to acknowledge the amazing work of the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta and thank them for their guidance and their leadership over the past months.

To everyone who participated in the engagement sessions over the past months and told their story, thank you again for your bravery and for putting your trust in us.

We will honour that trust.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Assembly rise and join me in offering their thanks and their honour to the survivors who are with us today.

[Standing ovation]