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APOLOGY TO STUDENTS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

**Representatives of Aboriginal Community
Received in Committee of the Whole**

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, June 12, 2008

THE SENATE

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APOLOGY TO STUDENTS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

REPRESENTATIVES OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY
RECEIVED IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to hear from Phil Fontaine, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations; Mary Simon, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Clem Chartier, President of the Metis National Council; and Patrick Brazeau, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, respecting the government's statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools.

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, leaders of our First Nations, on behalf of the Liberal opposition in the Senate of Canada, it is with great pride and solemnity that I welcome leaders of our First Nations here in the upper chamber.

I know I speak for all my colleagues when I say how deeply honoured we are that you have agreed to be here to formally reply to the statement of apology the Prime Minister made in the other place yesterday.

[Translation]

By its very design, vocation and history, the Senate of Canada has always been the chamber of Parliament that gives a voice to minorities. Today, your presence before our Committee of the whole is an historic event and clearly in keeping with the mission of this upper chamber.

Furthermore, we have the privilege of accepting, hearing and recording for posterity your response to the apology presented yesterday by the Prime Minister and the leaders of the other parties.

We know that the road you have travelled to reach this historic moment has been long, fraught with difficulties and punctuated by delays, obstacles and reversals.

By attempting to crush the pride of the First Nations and eradicate their Aboriginal identity, the Indian residential schools policy destroyed your social fabric and family traditions and tarnished the memory of our collective history.

For you, it is a deep and painful wound that is slow to heal. For us, it is the shame of having wrongfully thrust you into the destructive shadows cast by this episode. We admire your courage in the face of the unjust, disgraceful and deplorable treatment you received. Together with our colleagues in the other chamber, we extend our most sincere apologies.

[English]

Children were separated from their families for long periods of time, punished for speaking their native language and stripped of their traditions. Subjected to mental, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of those claiming to civilize them, many died from disease and neglect, while others survived in lives of despair.

Yesterday the government, on behalf of all of us, provided a long awaited and needed apology. We all hope that concrete actions will now follow to prove our sincerity and good faith by helping to heal the wounds.

May your words help pave the way towards atonement, healing and reconciliation, and let the words from a Greek tragedy remind us that wisdom can be learned from this tragedy and that a new chapter in the story of our partnership is indeed possible:

In our sleep, pain which cannot forget
Falls drop by drop upon the heart, until
In our own despair, and against our will
Comes wisdom . . .

Honoured guests, we respectfully seek your guidance on how we can all move forward and strengthen our partnership for the benefit of all of us and for our future generations.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.
