JUSTICE FOR CANADA'S FIRST NATIONS

Posted on July 18, 2015 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Viken L. Attarian, Montreal, 12 July 2015

Five actions I commit to as a **citizen.**

1. Ensure that all my elected representatives actively and continuously engage to improve the lives of members of First Nations. Not only through the legislative process, but also through personal actions.

2. Work to ensure the teaching of Canadian history at all levels in such a way as to restore the rightfully important role that the First Nations have played on our continent, that all their diverse and detailed histories be also taught as an integral part of the history of Canada, and that all wrongful decisions and actions committed against First Nations be admitted to as such in those histories that will be taught.

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3. Work to ensure that monuments to victims of major wrongful actions against First Nations be erected in all the places where such wrongful actions have taken place, so that these monuments may become living places of reflection and memory.

4. Continuously lobby my MP to enable the setting up of a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the case of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women.

5. To the best of my abilities, work for the recognition of the genocide committed against First Nations.

Five actions I commit to as a **lawmaker** (if elected) and that I urge all MPs to commit to.

1. Start a twinning program within the House of Commons to connect every MP with an aboriginal youth residing in their province or territory of representation, to act as a mentor and a personal guide for development; and then, work to ensure that such programs are also implemented within the provincial legislatures as well.

2. Ensure that all outstanding land claim settlements are streamlined to conclusion with a clear objective of timelines being committed to.

3. Advocate for and ensure that a Royal Commission of Inquiry is set up to address the case of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women.

4. Implement a national youth volunteer program for the reconstruction and rebuilding of First Nations communities.

5. Ensure that the cultural and linguistic heritage of the First Nations is preserved for future generations through the implementation of top-priority legislation and specific programs and projects on a continuous basis.

Give us OUR names

The Ottoman state orphanage is a place of darkness
Where the killers of my parents change me into one of them.
Where they beat me for speaking Armenian,
Where they starve me for praying in Armenian,
Where they torture me for singing in Armenian,
Where they murder me for refusing to change my name.
Prove to me that YOU are human,
Give me back my name.

The Lodz Ghetto is a place of darkness,
Where the murderers of my people never have enough,
Where they enslave me for their factories,
Where they force me to wear the yellow sign,
“Give me your children” they tell my parents
“We need to feed the death machines” they tell my parents
“Otherwise it will have to be you” they tell my parents
“You are just tattooed numbers” they tell us
Prove to me that YOU are human
Give me back my name.

The school where we also reside is a place of darkness
Where the cheaters of my parents have stolen us from them
After stealing our lands and cultures

They took away the most precious
The children who spoke and sang and laughed and played.
Here they beat me for speaking Mohawk
Here they starve me for singing in Cree
Here they torture me for being Dene or for not being one of them
They rape, kill and bury me to hide their own shame
Prove to me that YOU are human
Give me back MY name !

This poem is inspired by the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Canada's residential schools. It establishes, through a literary mean, a parallel between three genocidal policies of the 20th century and demonstrates their commonality of practice. The title and the theme refer to name and language as crucial pillars of identity and establishes the intent of their erasure. It also suggests that the act of genocide itself must be named for what it is. Here is some additional information about the source of inspiration for this poem. I encourage you to do your own research.

- After the Genocide of Armenians, the Turkish state gathered hundreds of thousands of Armenian orphans and turkified them in an act of the completion of the Genocide. *Orphans of the Genocide* by the Emmy-Award winning documentary filmmaker Bared Maronian, chronicles that story in great detail. I had the honor of being the first to bring that film to the attention of the Canadian public through the PBS station of Mountain Lake in Plattsburgh, New York.
- The story of the Lodz ghetto is one of the most horrific illustrations of the evil committed during WWII. The inhabitants of the ghetto were literally enslaved to produce for the war effort of the Nazis and were kept alive just above starvation level. The sick and the infirm were shipped off to concentration camps for mass extermination. The ghetto was led by the Nazi collaborator Chaim Rumkowski, who, in an infamous speech in 1942, asked parents to give away their children to the gas chambers so that the ghetto may survive. Many families committed collective suicide rather than give away their children. The rest were forced to give away their children and over 20,000 were murdered as a result. The ghetto was completely exterminated in August of 1944 and Rumkowski himself was killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. When the Soviet army liberated Lodz in early 1945, less than 900 of the original 230,000 Jews of Lodz had survived. The TV episode called *Children of Earth* of one of my favorite British science fiction series *Torchwood*, a spin-off of the great *Doctor Who* series, is inspired by the story of the Lodz ghetto.
- The story of Canadian residential schools for aboriginal people is arguably the most shameful part of our history. It is ultimately about the bad faith shown towards our First Nations, who in an act of great wisdom, understood very early that education would be the key to secure the

future of their people and negotiated that right in their treaties with the Crown. The Canadian government then over a period spanning most of the twentieth century, (ab)used that same right, in actions motivated by concepts of racial superiority, disrespect for indigenous culture and a drive to erase the history of the presence of native populations on Canadian soil, by committing genocidal acts of violence against our First Nations by targeting the most vulnerable, their children.