



News Release

MINISTER PRENTICE PROVIDES UPDATE ON THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

OTTAWA (January 31, 2007) – The Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, and Minister Responsible for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, today provided an update on the progress made by Canada's New Government toward a fair and lasting resolution of the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

“Since taking office, Canada's New Government has taken all the steps necessary to ensure that the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is approved and implemented as quickly as possible,” said Minister Prentice.

The Settlement Agreement requires the approval of the Courts in nine jurisdictions across Canada, and the Government is pleased to confirm that the Settlement Agreement has now been substantially approved by those Courts. “We anticipate that the formal approval of the Settlement Agreement may proceed in the coming weeks, and that we will in turn move further toward implementation of the Agreement with the commencement of the Opt-Out Period in the next few months,” said Minister Prentice.

In recognition of the age of many former students, and in recognition of the length of time required for the approval of the Settlement Agreement, the Government launched an Advance Payment Program on May 10, 2006, for elderly former students who were 65 or older when the Settlement Agreement negotiations began on May 30, 2005. “I am proud to report that the Advance Payment Program, which ended on December 31, 2006, has provided \$8,000 to each of 9,938 elderly former students who resided at Indian Residential Schools, totalling \$79.5 Million,” noted Minister Prentice.

Among other things, the Settlement Agreement provides for a Common Experience Payment to all former students who resided at an eligible Indian Residential School. Applications for the Common Experience Payment will be processed in accordance with the Settlement Agreement, and all applications will be verified against the Government's records. In cases where records are unavailable, other means of establishing the residency of a former student at a particular Indian Residential School will be possible.

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The Settlement Agreement also provides for the payment of fees to legal counsel who represented former students in the Settlement Agreement negotiation process, and in many cases for some years prior to the beginning of the negotiations, for their work on behalf of former students. The Settlement Agreement sets out a verification process for all legal fees to be verified and approved by the Courts.

“The Government believes that it is important for all elements of the Settlement Agreement, including the payment of fees to legal counsel, to be subject to appropriate verification and approval by the Courts,” noted Minister Prentice.

“Given that former students need to prove that they resided at an eligible Indian Residential School to receive a Common Experience Payment, it is only reasonable and appropriate that legal counsel should have their bills verified as well. Further, this is part of the agreement that the Merchant Law Group negotiated,” said Minister Prentice.

Accordingly, the Government recently filed an appeal of the decision by the Saskatchewan Court of Queen’s Bench, respectfully seeking that the matter of the fees payable to the Merchant Law Group be verified by the Court in accordance with the Settlement Agreement. The Government strongly believes that the matter of the verification of the fees payable to the Merchant Law Group need not, nor should not, delay the implementation of the Settlement Agreement.

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