



THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA

October 28, 2021

Tae-Ung Baik
Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Chairperson:

Thank you for your correspondence dated June 11, 2021. Please find enclosed the U.S. response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DKronenfeld", enclosed in a thin blue rectangular border.

Daniel A. Kronenfeld
Deputy Permanent Representative
Human Rights

SUBJECT: U.S. Response to June 11, 2021 letter from the Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding American Indian and Alaskan Native children sent to federal boarding schools

The United States thanks the Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances for his June 11, 2021 letter regarding American Indian and Alaskan Native children sent to federal boarding schools.

The United States shares the Working Group's concerns about the fate of these children and the harmful cultural assimilation policies that attempted to suppress children's Native identity, language, and culture. The Biden-Harris Administration is addressing harmful cultural assimilation practices that American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian children endured in federal boarding schools. Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a U.S. Cabinet member heading the Department of the Interior (DOI), has raised awareness of this issue. Through the American Rescue Plan, the American Jobs Plan, and the fiscal year 2022 budget, the United States has already made investments to support Native communities' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and towards fulfilling longstanding trust and treaty obligations. Through a Presidential Memorandum issued when the President first took office, the President requires all Federal agencies to hold tribal consultations prior to making any decisions that impact tribal communities. This consultation process will include holding discussions with boarding school survivors and their family members.

In June, Secretary Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. Its main objectives are to identify boarding school facilities and sites; the locations of known and possible student burial sites; and the identities and tribal affiliations of children who were present at these locations. The Department is compiling decades of records to begin a proper review, building a framework for how it will partner with outside organizations, and developing processes to collaborate with Tribal nations to protect and share sensitive information, as well as grave sites and sacred burial traditions. This work will include a written report to Secretary Haaland by April 2022 detailing the findings of the investigation to that point.

It is important to note that although DOI's Bureau of Indian Education still operates residential boarding schools, they do not reflect any of the assimilation and abusive practices of the past. These are valuable institutions that are embraced by Tribal communities and provide children with an education rooted in culturally relevant instruction and indigenous traditions and practices.