

September 30, 2024

Re: Embark Board of Directors Recognizes and Reaffirms Truth and Reconciliation Day

Content Warning/Trigger Warning: residential schools, Indigenous harm and trauma, colonialism, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma

Embark Sustainability Society wholeheartedly acknowledges that our organization is situated on the stolen and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səliłilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), kʷikwəłwəm (Kwkwetlem), qíćəy (Katzie), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen Nations. As an independent student society, we are cognizant that universities like Simon Fraser University are institutions that arise from and are part of settler colonial states and thus exist at the expense of Indigenous Nations who have both moral and legal rights to this land and to self-governance. In this way, we must and want to support and uplift the work of Indigenous Nations to self-determination and Land Back. We enact truth-telling in the areas of our work to center marginalized communities and their stories. We acknowledge that this statement alone only grazes the surface of the work we are committed to. We remain dedicated to centering the stories and supporting the calls of Indigenous People(s) and Nations actionably.

Truth and Reconciliation Day, September 30th, commemorates the traumatic legacy and ongoing impact of the residential school system on Indigenous Nations. This day coincides with Orange Shirt Day founded by Phyllis Webstad, a woman of the Northern Secwepemc Nation and residential school survivor whose orange shirt, gifted from her grandmother, was taken on the first day of school, symbolizing the loss of culture, identity, and family experienced by Indigenous children in residential schools. Read more about Phyllis Webstad's story [here](#).

An amendment to the Indian Act in 1920 mandated residential school attendance, forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families, and placing them in residential schools as a means to eradicate their First Nation, Métis, and Inuit identities. The Canadian government at the time framed this act as a means of "educating" Indigenous children, and even today is often disguised as attempts to assimilate them into Canadian culture. However, this intentional effort was cultural genocide in efforts to eliminate Indigenous traditions and identities. This harm being minimized or misrepresented as "assimilation" is destructive, as Indigenous children painfully experienced severe cultural loss being stripped of their names, punished for speaking their native languages, and taught to reject their Indigenous cultures. This pain was further intensified by high rates of abuse and

neglect. Many Indigenous children did not make it home due to fatal abuse, high rates of serious and untreated illness, and attempts to escape. The violence and death caused by the residential school system are insurmountable, with unmarked mass graves still being uncovered at residential school sites. Until the rediscovery of nearly 215 Indigenous children on the grounds of the former Kamloops residential school in 2021, this shameful part of Canadian history had largely been swept under the rug or minimized, despite survivors and Indigenous communities speaking out about these gravesites. The last residential school closed just 27 years ago in 1997, and coupled with the mass removal of Indigenous children into the welfare system starting in the 1960s, Indigenous People(s) continue to endure the colonial harms of land theft, family displacement, loss of culture, and intergenerational trauma.

The impacts of the residential school system are a direct affront to food justice and food sovereignty. Not only did the residential school system strip children of access to their traditional foods and knowledge of traditional food preparation, these schools were also sites of neglect, starvation and human experimentation. Nutrition experiments of the 1940s and 1950s used the malnutrition of residential school students as a baseline, the results of which informed 'Canada's Food Guide', creating national nutrition recommendations. These experiments created destructive health impacts for Indigenous families for generations.

Government, legal, and healthcare systems continue to enact violence against Indigenous Nations through racial profiling and police brutality while denying them access to adequate healthcare, education, and childcare. As of 2021, over half of children in foster care are Indigenous, despite accounting for only 7.7% of the total population of children, and Indigenous families suffer a disproportionately higher rate of food insecurity than non-Indigenous families. We reject the notion that colonial harms are past harms and commit ourselves to seeking truth and dismantling systemic harm for past, current, and future generations of Indigenous Peoples.

We particularly confront the ongoing violence and loss of Indigenous lives at the hands of the RCMP and police forces. In the last few weeks alone, the painful and insidious legacy of colonialism continues to reveal itself, as Indigenous Nations across so-called Canada are forced to mourn again and again. We condemn these acts of violence and the systemic injustices that perpetuate such harm. The recurring and disturbing injustices serve as stark reminders of the urgent need for profound change and accountability of colonial institutions. As we reflect on the impacts of colonialism, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting Indigenous-led efforts for justice, healing, and sovereignty.

“Every person who works in the healthcare system, in fact every British Columbian, must acknowledge this reality and work together to ensure health care for Indigenous People is equitable and culturally safe and focuses on the needs of the individual, not the attitudes of the system” - Grand Chief Stewart Phillip (President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs)

As an independent student society, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves and make efforts to learn the truth about the violence that occurred at these schools. We affirm our commitment to:

- Assert Indigenous People(s) inherent right(s) and title(s) to the land, as well as the right to self-determination in all forms;
- Support [Indigenous-Led Control of Indigenous Education](#)
- Ensuring Indigenous students’ voices are amplified by providing holistic and ongoing support throughout their academic journeys; and
- Acknowledging the disproportionate impacts of the ongoing climate crisis and environmental genocide on Indigenous Peoples' ability to uphold their rights and responsibilities to the land.

Learn more about Truth & Reconciliation, Indigenous communities, and other reflective pieces:

- Find out what Indigenous lands you occupy: native-land.ca
- [Orange Shirt Day – Phyllis Webstad’s story](#)
- [Impact of government policies on Indigenous communities | Sixties Scoop](#)
- [Educational pieces: The Scream by Kent Monkman](#)
- [Addressing Indigenous racism and discrimination in B.C. Health care](#)
- [Timeline of the canadian residential school system and their lasting effects](#)
- [The dark history of Canada's Food Guide: How experiments on Indigenous children shaped nutrition policy](#)

Support Indigenous communities at SFU:

- **SFU First Nations, Métis & Inuit Student Association (FNMISA)**
 - Website: <https://fnmisa.ca/>
 - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sfu.fnmisa/>
- **SFU Indigenous Student Centre**
 - Website: <https://www.sfu.ca/students/indigenous.html>
 - Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/sfu_isc/
- **Office for Aboriginal Peoples**
 - Website: <https://www.sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples.html>