



## MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release on February 28, 2023

### **Survivors' Secretariat Announces Moving from Criminal Investigation and Continuing with the Coroner Investigation at their Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

**SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER, February 28, 2023** – Survivors' Secretariat held its Annual General Meeting for the 2021-2022 fiscal year at the Gathering Place by the Grand this Tuesday, February 28. Secretariat Lead, Laura Arndt reviewed how the Survivors' Secretariat got its start and thanked Kimberly Murray for her assistance in establishing the Survivors' Secretariat. Murray led the Secretariat until her acceptance of the position of Special Interlocutor for Unmarked Burials and Missing Children. The Secretariat also thanked the Six Nations of the Grand River for providing them with interim funding to get the organization off the ground and begin the difficult and painstaking work to “Bring Our Children Home.”

When the Secretariat was first launched in the fall of 2021, the investigation into the unmarked burials and missing children associated with the Mohawk Institute was approached as a criminal investigation. At the AGM, the Secretariat announced that the criminal investigation is winding down and the coroner's investigation will continue. “We would like to thank the Police Taskforce for its assistance over the past year and a half and we look forward to the receipt of their final report, which is anticipated in the fall of 2023,” said Laura Arndt, Secretariat Lead.

Having a coroner-led investigation will change the focus from placing blame on individuals to creating opportunities for closure. A coroner investigation differs as its focus is on the victim, rather than the culprit. A coroner-led investigation will provide the Secretariat more access to the data uncovered and will allow for more resource sharing amongst the investigators and archival researchers. This is because evidence uncovered will no longer be viewed as protected, under an active criminal investigation. This will also allow the opportunity for families of victims to review files relevant to their families. The process is similar to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls investigation where families were able to review files about their loved ones in a closed session.

“It has been an honour to work with the Survivor’s Secretariat, as part of the Multi-Jurisdictional Police Task Force. The secretariat’s guidance and information sharing greatly assisted us in the criminal investigation. We are grateful for their invitation to help support them in this journey,” said Chief Darren Montour, Six Nations Police Services.

“The Office of the Chief Coroner will continue to support the Survivor’s Secretariat in trying to find answers about what happened to children who didn’t return home after being sent to Indian Residential Schools,” said Dirk Huyer, Ontario’s Chief Coroner, “We will work closely with the community to determine the next steps forward and share our findings along the way.”

Among the attendees were representatives from the Police Taskforce (Six Nations Police, Brantford Police and Ontario Provincial Police), the Office of the Chief Coroner, the Office of the Special Interlocutor, Survivors’ Secretariat Advisory Group Members and various institutions that assisted the Secretariat in its early days. The work of the Secretariat continues to be focused on four key areas of Ground Search, Archival Research, Advocacy and Commemoration.

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**About Survivors’ Secretariat:**

The Survivors’ Secretariat is a Survivor-led initiative established in 2021. The Secretariat coordinates protocols and processes associated with the death investigation and facilitates the gathering of community and Survivor statements as they work to document and share the truth about what happened at the Mohawk Institute during its 136 years of operation. Please visit our website for more information about the Secretariat: [www.survivorssecretariat.ca](http://www.survivorssecretariat.ca)

**About the Multi-jurisdictional Police Task Force**

The Multi-Jurisdictional Police Task Force is comprised of the Six Nations Police Service (Chief Darren Montour), Brantford Police Service (Chief Rob Davis), Ontario Provincial Police (Detective Superintendent Tina Chalk). The group was formed in the fall of 2021 to assist the Survivors’ Secretariat will conducting a criminal investigation into the known deaths occurring at the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School.

**About the Office of the Chief Coroner**

The Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) for Ontario provides death investigations and inquests to ensure that no death will be overlooked, concealed or ignored. The findings are used to generate recommendations to help improve public safety and prevent deaths in similar circumstances. [www.ontario.ca/page/office-chief-coroner-and-ontario-forensic-pathology-service](http://www.ontario.ca/page/office-chief-coroner-and-ontario-forensic-pathology-service)

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