



(https://news.vice.com)



AMERICAS (/TOPIC/AMERICAS)

They Died Young and Mysteriously — Now We May Finally Know Why



By Rachel Browne (/contributor/rachel-browne)

October 6, 2015 | 2:55 pm

Five of them — three of whom were 15 years old — are believed to have drowned in the waters running into Lake Superior. Two reportedly died of overdoses.

And now, after years of delays, the families of seven young Aboriginal students who mysteriously died while attending high schools hundreds of miles from their reserves in northern Ontario may finally get at least some answers.

They sat this week in a cramped Thunder Bay courtroom for the launch of a coroner's inquest — said to be the largest of its kind in Ontario, with testimony expected from 200 witnesses over the next five months.

The inquest was prompted (<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/09/16/seven-native-youth-left-for-high-school-and-never-returned-finally-an-inquest.html>) by the deaths of the students who came from remote communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). The deaths occurred from 2000 to 2011.

"All institutions that are implicated in this have to be accountable and have to fix themselves so this never happens again," Julian Falconer lawyer for NAN, told the courtroom Monday morning. "NAN's role is to recognize that it equally, like any institution here, has to recognize that it needs to improve itself."

Because there aren't enough schools near their homes, all of these students, like hundreds of their peers, were forced to make the long trek to the city to attend high school and live with strangers in boarding homes. Many of the seven who died had to move as far as 435 miles away from home to go to school in Thunder Bay.

As many First Nations leaders have noted, these deaths are eerily similar to those that happened during the residential school era in Canada (http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/canadas-truth-commission-on-residential-schools-is-coming-to-a-troubling-close-far-from-reconciliation) and make long-held concerns over the lack of education services in remote communities across the country all the more urgent.

"Our students are in a vulnerable situation," Terry Waboose, deputy grand chief for the NAN, told CBC News in 2012 (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/first-nations-want-inquest-into-7-student-deaths-1.1239226>). "We're the only people in the country that have to send our kids out to school."

This inquest, called at the chief coroner's discretion, will examine relevant circumstances that might have indirectly or directly caused the deaths. The jury will consider the evidence and come to recommendations to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future.

The inquest was supposed to start in 2012, but was stalled because of various legal hurdles, including rules that ensure representation from First Nations people on juries.

Even though that has since been resolved, new issues arose Monday morning because of the lack of seating available in the courtroom (<http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/christie-blatchford-push-come-to-shove-courts-cant-or-wont-properly-accommodate-vital-inquest-into-aboriginal-deaths>) for those who wanted to attend the hearing, including family members of teens who died.

Here are 4 of 10 public seats for the long anticipated and the biggest FN

— Alvin Fiddler (@gcfiddler) October 2, 2015
(<https://twitter.com/gcfiddler/statuses/65002203043638>)

This is shameful, for such an important inquest into the deaths of 7 FN youth — Wab Kinew
(@WabKinew) October 2, 2015
(<https://twitter.com/WabKinew/statuses/650023872088141>)

"It effectively sends a signal that inquests are a second-rate form of justice, that public access isn't a priority and, most gratingly, that aboriginal lives appear to matter less," one National Post reporter wrote. (<http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/christie-blatchford-push-come-to-shove-courts-cant-or-wont-properly-accommodate-vital-inquest-into-aboriginal-deaths>)

Alvin Fiddler, Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, tweeted his frustration. "You know we have lots of room for First Nations peoples in jail," he told the CBC, pointing to the statistic that indigenous people comprise more than 20 percent of Canada's prison population, despite representing only 4 percent of the entire population. "But when it comes to access to the courtroom, there's no room at all."

Earlier this summer, Canada's federal police force announced that it knew of nearly 1,200 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada since 1980. However, activists and community leaders say that number is likely much higher. Last year, Statistics Canada reported that (http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/08/22/aboriginal_men_murdered_at_higher_rate_than_abori) 1,750 male aboriginal people have been killed in the last three decades.

Discussions about indigenous rights have largely been absent from the ongoing federal election campaign, but in their 2015 budget, the Conservatives pledged to direct \$500 million over six years (<http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/a-deafening-silence-on-aboriginal-issues/>) to schools located on First Nations reserves. The Liberals promised to invest \$2.6 billion for those schools, and the NDP is slated to release its plan for First Nations education soon.

The hearing is scheduled to continue until March.

Follow Rachel Browne in Twitter: @rp_browne (https://twitter.com/rp_browne)

TOPICS: *americas* (/topic/americas), *canada* (/topic/canada), *aboriginal* (/topic/aboriginal), *coroner's inquest* (/topic/coroner39s-inquest), *ontario* (/topic/ontario), *nishnawbe aski nation* (/topic/nishnawbe-aski-nation), *indigenous* (/topic/indigenous), *alvin fiddler* (/topic/alvin-fiddler)

RECOMMENDED

(/article/exclusive-vice-news-investigates-the-uks-4500-prisoners-doing-life-for-minor-crimes)

Exclusive: VICE News Investigates the UK's 4,500 Prisoners Doing Life for Minor Crimes

(/article/exclusive-vice-news-investigates-the-uks-4500-prisoners-doing-life-for-minor-crimes)

(/article/i-got-mugged-in-mexico-city-and-going-to-the-police-just-made-shit-worse)

'I Got Mugged in Mexico City, and Going to the Police Just Made Shit Worse' (/article/i-got-mugged-in-mexico-city-and-going-to-the-police-just-made-shit-worse)

(/video/my-escape-from-syria-europe-or-die)

My Escape From Syria: Europe or Die (/video/my-escape-from-syria-europe-or-die)

(/video/indias-mental-health-crisis)

India's Mental Health Crisis (/video/indias-mental-health-crisis)

MOST POPULAR



42:32 ▶ -islamic-state-full-length)

The Islamic State (Full Length) (/video/the-islamic-state-full-length)



20:24 ▶ ained-by-militias-libyas-migrant-trade-part-1)

Detained by Militias: Libya's Migrant Trade (Part 1) (/video/detained-by-militias-libyas-migrant-trade-part-1)

COMMENTS**4 Comments****Vice News****1** **Login** ▾**♥ Recommend****🔗 Share****Sort by Best** ▾

Join the discussion...

Xam • 18 hours ago

So to be clear, no one knows how they died to this day. They went completely uninvestigated.

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

WORK AT HOME::Earn \$97/HOUR ➔ **Xam** • 5 hours ago

WORK AT HOME::Get \$97/HOUR...I just purchased themselves a McLaren F1 when I got my check for \$19993 this past 4 weeks and just over 17 thousand last month . this is really the nicest-work I've had . I began this 10-months ago and straight away started making more than \$97... p/h .

learn the facts here now

ze.....

▶▶▶▶ <http://GoogleSuperTechJobsHomeEmploymentSoft/get/top...>*********

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

FuKUpThisWorld ➔ **Xam** • 18 hours ago

Seriously.. Why were there no investigations?!?!

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Xam ➔ **FuKUpThisWorld** • 3 hours ago

Nope. Cause of death suspected drowning, misadventure etc. this was called for by the coroner who just gets a kid's body days after the fact a couple of times a year.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

IN THE NEWS

(/article/two-more-stabbings-in-israel-as-street-violence-surges)

Two More Stabbings in Israel as Street Violence Surges (/article/two-more-stabbings-in-israel-as-street-violence-surges)

SHARE ➞

(/article/fewer-people-than-ever-live-in-poverty-but-the-worlds-poorest-people-are-still-screwed)

Fewer People Than Ever Live in Poverty — But the World's Poorest People Are Still Screwed (/article/fewer-people-than-ever-live-in-poverty-but-the-worlds-poorest-people-are-still-screwed)

SHARE ➞

(/article/syrian-rebels-face-coordinated-ground-attacks-and-russian-airstrikes)

Syrian Rebels Face Coordinated Ground Attacks and Russian Airstrikes (/article/syrian-rebels-face-coordinated-ground-attacks-and-russian-airstrikes)

SHARE ➞

(/article/the-us-is-going-to-let-nearly-6000-drug-offenders-out-of-federal-prison-early)

The US Is Going to Let Nearly 6,000 Drug Offenders Out of Federal Prison Early (/article/the-us-is-going-to-let-nearly-6000-drug-offenders-out-of-federal-prison-early)

SHARE ➞

(/article/canadas-liberals-vow-to-end-rampant-boil-water-advisories-on-reserves)

Canada's Liberals Vow to End Rampant Boil Water Advisories on Reserves (/article/canadas-liberals-vow-to-end-rampant-boil-water-advisories-on-reserves)

SHARE ➞

(/article/us-companies-stashed-trillions-in-tax-havens-last-year)

US Companies Stashed Trillions in Tax Havens Last Year (/article/us-companies-stashed-trillions-in-tax-havens-last-year)

SHARE ➞

(/article/canadas-prime-minister-considers-more-expansive-niqab-ban)

Canada's Prime Minister Considers More Expansive Niqab Ban (/article/canadas-prime-minister-considers-more-expansive-niqab-ban)

SHARE ➞

(/article/feds-say-former-un-general-assembly-president-lived-large-off-chinese-bribes)

Feds Say Former UN General Assembly President Lived Large Off Chinese Bribes (/article/feds-say-former-un-general-assembly-president-lived-large-off-chinese-bribes)

SHARE ➞



Exclusive: VICE News Investigates the UK's 4,500 Prisoners Doing Life for Minor Crimes (/article/exclusive-vice-news-investigates-the-uks-4500-prisoners-doing-life-for-minor-crimes)

In a three-month investigation, VICE News looked into the case of the UK's forgotten prisoners — the thousands serving life sentences under abolished legislation with no release date in sight.

READ  clusive-vice-news-investigates-the-uks-4500-prisoners-doing-life-for-minor-crimes)

'I Got Mugged in Mexico City, and Going to the Police Just Made Shit Worse' (/article/i-got-mugged-in-mexico-city-and-going-to-the-police-just-made-shit-worse)

Because cops in Mexico.

READ  ot-mugged-in-mexico-city-and-going-to-the-police-just-made-shit-worse)

My Escape From Syria: Europe or Die (/video/my-escape-from-syria-europe-or-die)

With exclusive personal footage, VICE News gains an insight into the desperate trek of two Syrian refugees who give first-hand accounts of their journey, the life they left behind, and their hopes for the future.

18:58 ▶ -escape-from-syria-europe-or-die)