

Native American survivors of U.S. boarding schools recount abuses

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Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

Washington, July 11 (RHC)-- Elderly survivors of federally established U.S. boarding schools for Native Americans have recounted widespread atrocities at the government-run institutions in a meeting with U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

Haaland met on Saturday with the survivors at the Riverside Indian School, the oldest federally operated US boarding school for Native Americans, in her first stop on a year-long tour to collect first-hand accounts of rampant atrocities they faced at such facilities, which were, in effect, centers of forced assimilation for the indigenous people.

U.S. authorities began establishing abusive boarding schools in the early 1800s and continued operating them through the 1970s, with the stated goal of wiping out Native American culture.

"America prides itself on being an advocate of democracy and human rights around the world but was itself one of the worst violators of human rights when it comes to Native Americans," said the elected chief of the Kiowa tribe, Lawrence SpottedBird, who attended the meeting. "They need to be honest about this history so they can heal with us."

He further insisted that it is far overdue that the United States stops "whitewashing the brutal history" of the boarding school system. The U.S. government has never acknowledged how many children attended such schools, how many children died or went missing from them or even how many schools existed.

Horrendous conditions at former Indian boarding schools gained global attention last year when Native American tribal leaders in Canada announced the discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 children at the site of the former Kamloops residential school for indigenous children, as such institutions are known in Canada.

Unlike the United States, Canada has begun conducting a full investigation into its boarding schools through a so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In May, Haaland, the first Native American female Cabinet secretary in U.S. history, released an initial report from the Interior Department's continuing investigation into the history of the notorious boarding schools across the United States.

She told a crowd of nearly 300 people that federal Indian boarding school policies had touched every indigenous person she knew, and that all Native Americans "carry the trauma in our hearts." "I'm here to listen. I will listen with you, I will grieve with you, I will believe you and I will feel your pain," she proclaimed at the meeting.

Following Haaland's brief remarks, several elderly survivors of the US-based Indian boarding schools took turns to recount abuses they suffered decades in the past, with nearly all of them insisting that they were separated from their families by ages 4 or 5 and rarely made it home until they graduated from high school.

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