



## **Resource Guide #1**

# **Indigenous Allyship: How Zoroastrians Can Support Indigenous Communities**



**September 15th, 2021**

## **Introduction**

On May 27th, 2021, findings were released regarding the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia. The Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation released results from a survey of the grounds which [uncovered the remains of approximately 215 children buried at the site.](#)

Since this discovery, hundreds of unmarked graves have been discovered across Canada, informing the world of the tragic history and continued mistreatment of the Indigenous people of North America.

As Zoroastrian youth living on Indigenous land, we felt it was necessary to help educate our community on the history and trauma of the original stewards of our nations. This guide serves as a resource for North American Zoroastrians to learn about the history of settler-colonialism, the impact on Indigenous people today, and what we as Zoroastrians can do to be allies with Indigenous communities.

## **History**

Indigenous populations throughout North America have been displaced and forcibly removed from their lands through the process of settler-colonialism. Their land was taken for the purpose of developing a society for settlers. Historically, settler-colonialism has involved committing genocide, as was done in the [Sand Creek Massacre of 1864](#) and the [Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890](#). In addition, settler-colonialism has involved the theft of land through treaties that were later broken or ignored, as was done with the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which is still being contested to this day.

In 1868, the United States entered the Fort Laramie treaty with the Sioux and Arapaho. This treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation in the Dakota Territory and designated the Black Hills for exclusive use by native peoples. But once gold was found in the Black Hills, The United States attempted to purchase this land from the Sioux but were denied, as this was a sacred place for the Sioux. The United States Army was ultimately ordered to defend the miners searching for gold, resulting in a major conflict between the two groups. The United States continued its battle against the Sioux for this land until the government finally confiscated it in 1877, leaving the Sioux - who were traditionally nomadic hunters - to a farming lifestyle on a reservation instead. This treaty, among many others in North America, has been at the center of legal debate and controversy ever since.

## **Pressing news**

In the United States and Canada, there are around 6 million people who claim Native American/First Nations identity. The members of these Indigenous communities face many challenges fighting for their culture, history, and rights. Here are some pressing reports and news stories on Indigenous communities:



## **Residential Schools**

Sorrow, anger, and alarm arose from the news that 1,400 graves have been recently discovered at [indigenous residential schools](#) in Canada. Many have shared sentiments similar to Richard Jock of the First Nations Health Authority "That this [situation exists is sadly not a surprise](#) and illustrates the damaging and lasting impacts that the residential school system continues to have on First Nations people, their families and communities."

The United States has now established a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to identify and investigate past boarding schools, the location of known and potential burial sites, and the identities and tribal affiliations of the children who were taken there. Senators are also urging the Indian Health Service (IHS) to [ensure that culturally appropriate supports are in place](#) for survivors and communities impacted by lingering effects of Indian boarding school policies.

## **Grave Protection and Repatriation**

Several Indigenous people who were traditionally buried by their tribes, and laid to peace in decorated graves, had been exhumed by American scientists and are currently being examined by government agencies, museums, and other groups. In 1990, US Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation ACT (NAGPRA) which federally allowed for Native American tribes to [reclaim their ancestors' sacred objects and burial remains that were taken](#). Thirty-one years have passed since then and there are at least 116,000 Native Americans' remains that still have not been returned. The Secretary of the Interior and first Native American to hold a cabinet post, Deb Haaland, announced a plan to [expedite the return of remains held by institutions through clarification of timelines and closing loopholes](#).

## **Voting Rights**

Indigenous [Voting Rights](#) Coalition reports "Regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas, members of the 574 federally recognized tribes face many contemporary barriers to political participation." Many court cases are being fought to protect Native votes, including the recent strike-down of a North Dakota law which says you cannot vote without an ID that has a street address on it (not a PO box number). This disqualified many Native people since most reservation residents do not have street addresses.

Senator Luján from New Mexico plans to reintroduce the [Native American Voting Rights Act \(NAVRA\)](#) to ensure equal access to voting for all Native American voters living on tribal lands, will empower tribal communities in their efforts to improve access to voter registration, education on voting procedure, and ensuring equal treatment of tribal identification at the ballot box.

## **Environmental and Land Issues**

President Biden signed an Executive Order this year to revoke the permit issued by the Trump administration to TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline. This pipeline would have crossed "the ancestral lands, sacred sites, and historic sites of the tribes of Fort Belknap."



The tribes also fear the pipeline may rupture and spill oil as the existing Keystone Pipeline has on 3 different occasions. Since 1995, there have been around 2000 major accidents involving pipelines resulting in \$3 billion in property damage. The ruling that the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#) would temporarily shut down pending an environmental review was also a victory for Native Americans as the pipeline travels underneath the Missouri river which is the drinking source for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

### **Connection to Zoroastrianism**

The Zoroastrian religion places immense importance on not only environmental consciousness but also on helping others. Ever since ancient times, both the Zoroastrians and Native Americans placed great importance on maintaining and respecting the environment. Furthermore, the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** prayer states that those who help the righteous who are oppressed will make **Ahura Mazda** king.

As Zoroastrians, we must take every opportunity to help those in need while maintaining and improving our surroundings. We can support and donate to charities [dedicated to Native American interests](#), as well as studying Native American history. By doing so, we not only help improve our understanding of another culture(s), but we will also be helping and supporting those who were oppressed and whose culture was attacked and almost destroyed.

Historically, the Zoroastrians faced immense persecution after the Arab invasion of Persia. Like the Indigenous peoples of North and South America, countless Zoroastrian religious, historical, and medical texts were destroyed along with grand buildings and temples.

### **What can we do as allies?**

As Zoroastrians living in North America, being a genuine ally to Indigenous peoples requires self-reflection, listening, and a willingness to educate ourselves and our peers.

We have listed book recommendations, social media accounts, podcasts, and other content for Zoroastrians to consume and educate themselves and their communities on these issues. As well, we have listed indigenous organizations and causes to donate to.

#### To Read

- 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act by Bob Joseph
- The Inconvenient Indian by Thomas King
- Seven Fallen Feathers by Tanya Talaga

#### Social Media

- [Wet'suwet'en Checkpoint](#)
- [The Conscious Kid](#)
- [ON CANADA PROJECT](#)

#### Podcasts

- MEDIA INDIGENA
- Unreserved with Falen Johnson
- The Secret Life of Canada



## Organizations

- Future Ancestors: Black and Indigenous-owned, a youth-led organization that advances climate justice and equity with a lens of ancestral accountability.
  - <https://www.futureancestors.ca/>
- Indian Residential School Survivor Society (IRSSS): Supports survivors of Residential Schools
  - <https://www.irsss.ca/>

## Other Action Items:

- [Know Whose Land You're On](#)  
(This app identifies Indigenous Nations, territories, and Indigenous communities across Canada.)
  
- [A Guide to Land Acknowledgements](#)  
(Utilize this guide when making land acknowledgments)

## About Zoroastrians

Zoroastrians are followers of one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions founded by the prophet Zarathushtra more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Iran. Zoroastrians have long served as bridge builders in interfaith dialogue, believing in truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence, respect and care for the environment, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians and Sassanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

## About FEZANA

Founded in 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) represents a diverse and growing Zarathushti community in the western diaspora. Guided by the blessings of Ahura Mazda and the teachings of prophet Zarathushtra, the non-profit federation serves as the coordinating body for 27 Zoroastrian associations and 14 corresponding groups in Canada and the United States. The activities of FEZANA are conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and unity among all member associations, and with due regard for the Zarathushti principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust, and charity toward all mankind. Visit [www.fezana.org](http://www.fezana.org) and follow FEZANA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook @TheFEZANA.



## About ZYNA

The Zoroastrian Youth of North America (ZYNA) is a FEZANA committee dedicated to advancing thought leadership, engagement, and active participation among next-generation Zarathushtis. ZYNA aims to increase the civic engagement and involvement of youth in the Zoroastrian community through an established infrastructure. By working to educate and provide community engagement opportunities for young Zarathushtis in Canada and the United States, ZYNA is creating a sustainable footprint for future generations to advance Zoroastrian interests throughout North America.

Did you enjoy reading this guide and would like to be part of creating the next issue? Please reach out to Bita Kavooosi at [bitakavooosi@gmail.com](mailto:bitakavooosi@gmail.com).

To see all our resource guides please visit <https://fezana.org/category/zyna/resourceguide/>



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