

Native redress fails, say lawyers

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The feds' \$1.7-billion alternative dispute resolution process announced Thursday to fast-track settlements involving victims of abuse at aboriginal residential schools has not addressed the main issue, says Calgary lawyer Vaughn Marshall.

"The federal government's program will only compensate for sexual and physical abuse," said the lawyer involved in a class-action suit that involves hundreds of the 4,200 Alberta claimants.

"It will not compensate survivors for the damage caused from the severe attack on their culture and language, which was the underlying reason for residential schools in the first place, namely, to take the Indian out of the Indians."

For that reason, the contentious process announced by cabinet minister Ralph Goodale is flawed, the lawyer said.

The dispute involves 12,000 former students at 130 schools over more than five decades.

The schools were run by Ottawa in conjunction with the Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian churches.

Other lawyers involved in various class-action suits are also outraged victims may not be compensated equally across the country.

A draft of the federal plan drawn up in July says abuse victims in Ontario, British Columbia and the Yukon qualify for an individual maximum of \$245,000, compared with \$195,000 elsewhere.

"It's ludicrous. It makes no sense at all," said lawyer Tony Merchant, whose Regina firm represents 5,000 native people.