

\$100 million and no apology for victims

by Mark McEachern

WINNIPEG - The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the federal government are close to an historic agreement to heal the wounds suffered by aboriginals in residential schools, says the Winnipeg Free Press.

The agreement calls for a large sum of money - at least \$100 million - given as compensation to aboriginal victims who suffered years of abuse within the residential school system.

However, the report suggests that Ottawa will offer some form of apology but it will be in the way of a "statement of reconciliation".

"We are getting very close", said Phil Fontaine, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

Fontaine a survivor of abuse within the residential school system himself, has been calling for Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart for an apology to all of the victims during the last few months, but to date has not received one.

"It's important that there be some form of apology attached to the compensation, otherwise the fund-

ing for healing centres will be no different than any other government program", said one high-level source in the discussions not identified by the newspaper. "The apology is important to help those who were victims heal from the abuse."

Sources said the money would provide treatment and counselling

Assembly of First Nations and Ottawa close to reaching historic agreement

in aboriginal communities across Canada as well as pay for the revival of native culture such as language. The compensation package could reach as much as \$300 million over the next few years.

This announcement comes more than a year after the the Royal Commission on Aboriginal

Peoples called on Ottawa to issue an apology and compensation for the residential school problems they called an "act of profound cruelty."

Reports suggest that more than 100,000 natives passed through the residential schools before it was closed down in the mid-80's, many of which suffered sexual, physical and emotional abuse in a system which ignored their aboriginal culture.