

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian Students Engage in Conversation to Build a Better Future with Aboriginal Peers

-- Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative and Free The Children launch annual We Stand Together Campaign --

Toronto, ON – February 27, 2015: For the fifth year in a row, students across the country are coming together to start a national dialogue about Aboriginal history, culture and experiences by participating in the [We Stand Together](#) campaign. The initiative, which runs from February 23 to March 6, is part of [Free The Children's We Act](#) program in partnership with the [Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative](#) (MAEI) aims to mobilize thousands of students across Canada to build stronger connections with Aboriginal youth and a great understanding for aboriginal cultures in Canada.

"We Stand Together provides resources and tools to start the conversation for young Canadians so they can learn about the experiences, culture and challenges Aboriginal People face, allowing them to better understand how we are connected," said The Right Honourable Paul Martin, founder, MAEI. "Sharing cultural heritage is incredibly important; we need to foster understanding of Aboriginal culture and history in Canada for generations to come – this starts in the classroom."

"Aboriginal children in Canada are over two and a half times more likely to live in poverty than non-Aboriginal children. We need to understand why and take action to change this reality and raising awareness through campaigns such as We Stand Together is the first step," said Free The Children co-founder, Craig Kielburger. "Participation in the campaign is growing substantially in student engagement and school participation, which shows the campaign is moving the needle on awareness. The conversation has been started, now we need to focus on making it stronger and louder."

We Stand Together strives to create a dialogue for students to share with family and friends, sparking greater awareness of Canadian history. The two-week campaign provides educators with a variety of free resources including daily facts and lesson plans, as well as the challenges and opportunities present today. As an extension of the We Stand Together campaign, an Enrichment Program is offered to participating schools and groups to allow youth to gain further engagement and develop a deeper understanding on Aboriginal topics in their classrooms even after the campaign period.

For more information about We Stand Together or to sign up, please visit <http://www.freethechildren.com/get-involved/campaigns/we-stand-together/>.

For more information about the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, please visit www.maei-ieam.ca.

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About MAEI:

MAEI was established in 2008 in order to develop and facilitate lasting solutions to improve elementary and secondary school education outcomes for Aboriginal Canadians. MAEI brings together Aboriginal organizations, the business community, post-secondary institutions, First Nation schools and provincially and territorially-funded school boards to implement programs to support Aboriginal students. MAEI believes that the development of knowledge and skills will provide Aboriginal youth with greater opportunity and an incentive to complete secondary school and continue their education into post-secondary studies.

MAEI has five major projects across Canada: Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program, the Accounting Mentorship Program, Promising Practices in Aboriginal Education Website, the We Stand Together campaign in partnership with Free the Children, and the Model School Project at Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Walpole Island First Nation. MAEI is developing a First Nations Principals' Course and an online Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program.

About Free The Children

Free The Children is an international charity and educational partner. Founded in 1995 by international activist Craig Kielburger, Free The Children believes in a world where young people are free to achieve their fullest potential, and empowers youth to remove barriers that prevent them from being active local and global citizens. The organization's domestic programs – which include We Day, Free The Children's signature youth empowerment event – educate, engage and empower 2.3 million youth across North America and UK become engaged global citizens. Its international projects are implemented through a holistic and sustainable development model called Adopt a Village. Currently, Adopt a Village supports community development in eight countries; Kenya, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Ecuador, Haiti, Nicaragua, rural China and India. Through its international programming, Free The Children has brought more than 650 schools and school rooms to youth and provided clean water, health care and sanitation to 1 million people around the world, freeing children and their families from the cycle of poverty.

The organization has received the World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Award from the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, and has formed successful partnerships with leading school boards and Oprah's Angel Network. For more information, visit www.freethechildren.com

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