

# Thunder Bay youth deaths spur inquiry calls

**7 First Nation students found dead by river since 2000**

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Ontario's Nishnawbe Aski Nation has called for a commission of inquiry to investigate a disturbing pattern of youth deaths in Thunder Bay.

Seven high-schoolers have turned up dead over a period of 11 years under similar circumstances.

**'It's odd to lose seven youths in such similar circumstances from the year 2000, and it screams out to be to be looked at.'**—*Julian Falconer, lawyer for Nishnawbe Aski Nation*

All were from remote northern Ontario communities and were bused in regularly — some from hundreds of kilometres away — to attend school in Thunder Bay. Six out of seven of the boys allegedly drowned in the river in that city.

But a failure on the part of the province's inquest system to properly investigate the deaths has prompted the First Nation's Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose to request a commission of inquiry to find some answers.

"A commission of inquiry is the only way to fully investigate circumstances surrounding these tragic deaths, and to find ways to prevent similar tragedies from happening again," Waboose said Monday.

## Aboriginals lacking in juries

In such a process, a body formally constituted by government would make inquiries and report its findings, along with recommendations, to the government.

Julian Falconer, a lawyer for Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which represents 49 northern First Nations, called the deaths "very troubling" and said the sheer number of drownings since 2000 were giving community members pause.



*Julian Falconer, a lawyer representing the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, said an "odd" series of seven deaths involving high-school youths in Thunder Bay must be properly addressed through a commission of inquiry. Dave Chidley/Canadian Press*

Falconer explained that efforts to call an inquest in 2007 into the death of one of the boys, 15-year-old Reggie Bushie, were derailed because aboriginals have been "basically excluded from juries in this area" for several years.

Concerns about the [lack of aboriginal representation in the jury pool](#) effectively stopped the process.

"The result was the coroner just ruled on Friday in the Bushie case, that they can't convene an inquest because the jury roll is invalid," Falconer told CBC News on Monday. "Basically, we're in a state of utter standstill in terms of processes here."

### **'Screams out to be looked at'**

He added that the coroner's inquest system is also not set up to be able to investigate seven deaths and properly report on all of them.

A commission of inquiry, Falconer said, has been viewed as the only way that the seven Thunder Bay youth deaths will be properly addressed.

"It's odd to lose seven youths in such similar circumstances from the year 2000, and it screams out to be to be looked at," Falconer said.

Now that the call has been made for a commission of inquiry, Falconer said the Nishnawbe Aski Nation is awaiting the government's response.