

Denmark PM says sorry to Greenland Inuits taken for ‘heartless’ social experiment

Mette Frederiksen apologises in person to six surviving Greenlandic Inuits who were snatched from families as children more than 70 years ago



Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen apologises personally to six Greenlandic Inuit who were separated from their families more than 70 years ago.

Agence France-Presse
Thu 10 Mar 2022

Denmark’s prime minister has apologised in person to a group of Greenlandic Inuits who were removed from their families and taken to Copenhagen more than 70 years ago as part of an experiment to create a Danish-speaking elite.

“What you were subjected to was terrible. It was inhumane. It was unfair. And it was heartless,” Mette Frederiksen told the six surviving members of that group at an emotional ceremony in the capital. “We can take responsibility and do the only thing that is fair, in my eyes: to say sorry to you for what happened.”

In 1951, 22 Inuit children between the ages of five and eight were sent to Denmark, which was Greenland’s colonial power at the time but has since gained autonomy.

The parents had been promised their children would have a better life, learn Danish and return to Greenland one day as the future elite, in a deal between authorities in Copenhagen and Nuuk, the Greenland capital.

In Denmark, the children were not allowed to have any contact with their own families. After two years, 16 of the group were sent home to Greenland, but placed in an orphanage. The others were adopted by Danish families. Several of the children never saw their real families again.

An inquiry into their fate concluded more than half were very negatively affected by the experiment. Only six of the 22 are alive today.



Six Greenlandic Inuit who were separated from their families more than 70 years ago listen as Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen apologises personally to them on Wednesday.

“It was a big surprise for me when I realised that there were only six of them left, because they were not that old,” their lawyer Mads Pramming said. “They told me that the others had died of sorrow.”

The prime minister’s apology is “a big success for them”, Pramming said, two weeks after they each received financial compensation of 250,000 kroner (\$37,200). “First they got an apology in writing, and then the compensation for the violation of their human rights, and now they will have a face-to-face,” with the prime minister, Pramming said.

One of the six, Eva Illum, was grateful, saying: “Nothing had happened until now and it’s you, Mette [Frederiksen], who took the initiative to set up a commission two years ago.”

In December 2020, the prime minister offered the six an official apology.