

Canada celebrates 150th anniversary but indigenous protesters decry colonisation



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau leaves meeting with indigenous activists on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has kicked off celebrations to mark the country's 150th birthday amid heavy security as many citizens braved incessant rains and long delays to reach the main site in the nation's capital.

An estimated 500,000 people were in Ottawa for the long-anticipated Canada Day festivities, which featured a large outdoor celebration in front of the national Parliament, complete with acrobats, fireworks and musicians including Irish singer Bono and other members of rock band U2.

July 1 marks the 150th anniversary of the day Canada officially became a country. Britain ruled it before 1867.

Mr Trudeau, accompanied by Britain's Prince Charles, shook hands with some of the thousands of revellers who converged on Ottawa.

"Canada is a country made strong not in spite of our differences, but because of them," Mr Trudeau told the gathering.

"We don't aspire to be a melting pot; indeed, we know true strength and resilience flows through Canadian diversity."

Some First Nations groups noted Canada's history of mistreatment of indigenous people, and said Canada 150 ignored the tens of thousands of years of indigenous history.

Activists erected a teepee on Parliament Hill ahead of the official Canada Day celebrations in protest.

Mr Trudeau sat with the group for 40 minutes while they discussed their concerns.

About 100 indigenous protesters marched through the country's largest city, Toronto, carrying red flags and with some holding the Canadian national flag upside down.

Indigenous rights group Idle No More has called for a national day of action, telling supporters to hold rallies and take to social media.

"As a society, we must acknowledge and apologize for past wrongs, and chart a path forward for the next 150 years," Mr Trudeau said in a statement.

Security was already ramped up in the days ahead of the celebration and partygoers contended with road closures and concrete barriers across entrances into Parliament Hill, located in downtown Ottawa.

National and local police were also out in force, with security top of mind for many Canadians in the wake of fatal attacks in Europe, as well as a deadly shooting at a Quebec mosque in January.



Protesters said Canada 150 ignored the country's tens of thousands of years of indigenous history.

Events and installations celebrating the sesquicentennial milestone have already been held across the country this year, with the total cost to the Government reported to be \$500 million.

Along with fireworks, free museums and outdoor concerts nationwide, more than 50 special ceremonies to swear in new citizens were planned across the country.

Some cities are celebrating in more unusual ways. Toronto featured a giant rubber duck floating in its harbour, while Calgary planned a "living flag" composed of people wearing red and white.

The bash in Ottawa will culminate with a musical fireworks show that is billed as largest-ever such display for Canada Day.

"One hundred fifty years? Nah. Look at us: Canada is being born today," Mr Trudeau told the rain-soaked crowd.



Prince Charles and Camilla Duchess of Cornwall watch indigenous dancers with Justin Trudeau and his family.