



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **BC Assembly of First Nations Acknowledges Apology from Vatican as First Step Towards Reconciliation**

(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George BC) – The BC Assembly of First Nations acknowledges the apology from Pope Francis to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in Canada, for the Catholic Church's role in Indian Residential Schools, and the intergenerational traumas caused by atrocities committed to our children. A delegation of First Nations from BC, and across Canada met this week to witness the statement from Pope Francis.

“This apology was long overdue, and we acknowledge it as a first step. We will continue to support our survivors to heal, and further the reparations needed from the Catholic Church”, said Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “In BC, we had 18 Indian Residential Schools, as well as day schools, the majority of which were run by the Catholic Church under contract by the government of Canada. This apology also needs to go further – the Pope’s claim that only some church members were responsible for these crimes continues to sidestep the role the entire institution played in committing this horrific abuse,” he continued.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action, number 58 specifically, calls for an apology from all churches involved in the running of residential schools. Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches have all apologized for their actions in running these schools. This is the first time the Pope has done so.

The Catholic Church in Canada still has not met its full financial obligations from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement; instead, it squandered money meant for victims on lawyers and administrative fees. This injustice needs to be rectified, and the Canadian Bishops also must be held accountable as they play a key role in reconciliation and the genocide committed against First Nations.

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“We expect to see the Pope in Canada very soon, at which time we will discuss further the restitution required by First Nations survivors” said Teegee. “We are also calling on the Catholic Church to renounce the Papal Bulls of the Doctrine of Discovery, including the concept of Terra Nullius,” he continued. “These concepts have been used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous lands throughout the world and are at the root of countless colonial crimes. They need to be renounced and introduced with new decrees that acknowledge First Nations rights and title.”

The BC Assembly of First Nations board member Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir of Tk’emlups te Secwepemc and youth representative Taylor Behn-Tsakoza were both part of this historic mission to the Vatican. The BCAFN also acknowledges all the delegates from the BC region that went to the Vatican for this historic week. Regional Chief stated, “I hold my hands up to the survivors, leaders and staff that attended the meetings, and to those who have been working for years in holding the Catholic Church accountable. This is historic and I am grateful for all the difficult work. Mussi Cho.”

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