

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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FNLC Welcomes Vatican's Formal Rejection of 'Doctrine of Discovery'



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) After decades of appeals by Indigenous peoples around the world, the Vatican has finally formally rejected the “Doctrine of Discovery.” The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) welcomes the repudiation of this centuries-old concept that shaped and continues to influence colonial government policies and laws.

“The Vatican’s formal rejection of the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’ is an important step as we move forward to break down and reverse the colonial systems that were imposed on First Nations,” stated BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “The Pope’s apology and the Vatican’s announcement are all part of a process of reconciliation that continues First Nations’ journey toward healing from the legacy of the genocide and deeply entrenched structural violence. While coping with ongoing grief, First Nations continue the work to restore strong and vibrant governments, economies, relationships, languages and cultures. The Vatican must continue to stand up for Indigenous Peoples’ rights, title and cultures and actively support them as they strive to take control and maintain their own destinies.”

“Today we pause to acknowledge the hard-won repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, for it is the result of over a century of tooth and nail battles by our ancestors and Native peoples across Turtle Island,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President. “However, much like the Catholic Church’s apology for the harms it caused with the Residential School system, the formal repudiation comes without reparations or tangible actions to account for the systemic violence, destruction of land and culture, and genocide which were propagated by this deadly weapon of colonization. The Vatican has profited exorbitantly from the suffering and subjugation of Indigenous peoples the world over; I call on the Vatican to follow through with repudiation by committing to substantive reparations for the centuries of harm done. Open the vaults!”

“We welcome today’s papal announcement to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery,” said Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “To this day, the Doctrine of Discovery underlies Federal and Provincial Crown denial of Indigenous title and rights and continues to impede just and equitable reconciliation of Indigenous and Crown Titles and Rights in BC through treaties, agreements, and other constructive arrangements. The federal and provincial governments must continue to take steps to implement TRC Calls to Action 45 and 47 by co-developing, with Indigenous nations, a Proclamation or some other instrument or mechanism that expressly repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery, to once and for all, eliminate dependence on this destructive colonial concept. Governments must work to change all existing laws, policies and regulations that continue to carry the threads of the Doctrine of Discovery.”

The Vatican's announcement follows last year's apology to Canada's Indigenous Peoples made by Pope Francis for the Catholic Church's role in the horrors of the residential school system. At that time demands were made to build on the apologetic words with action and to revoke the Papal Bulls that played a key role in justifying the European conquest of Africa, the Americas and other Indigenous lands around the world.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

For further information, contact:

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President
Annette Schroeter, BCAFN Communications Officer
Colin Braker, FNS Communications Director

Phone: 250-490-5314
Phone: 778-281-1655
Phone: 604-328-4094