

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

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News Release

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Tangible Commitments Must Accompany Pope's Decades Late Apology for Residential Schools

((X^wməθk^wəy^əm (Musqueam), Sk^wx^wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – April 1, 2022) Earlier today and following a week of meetings in the Vatican with Indigenous delegates who had traveled from Canada, Pope Francis offered words of apology and regret for the actions of some of the members of the Catholic Church who played a role in the operation of residential schools in Canada between the 1880s and 1996. More than 150,000 Indigenous children were stolen from their families and communities and forced to attend residential schools where physical, sexual and emotional abuse was rampant.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated “The Pope must come to Canada and offer a fulsome and unequivocal apology for the role of all of the Catholic entities and the Catholic Church in the residential school system. This was more than abuses by a few individuals—it was in its entirety a massive human rights violation and part of a systemic and institutionalized attempt to destroy our communities that left deep intergenerational emotional damage and harm that continues to date. We expect the Pope to accompany today’s apology with commitments to restitution and reparation, including to repatriate lands used for church mission work and to enter into a new relationship based on mutual understanding, self-determination and respect.”

“I am glad to hear the Pope will come to Canada, as he has been asked to do for years by residential school survivors and Indigenous communities,” stated Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice-President. “We hope that when he does come to Canada he will offer a full and complete apology, and not one limited by reference to a few people and their role, when this entire legacy was one of missionary colonialism, racism and forced removal of children. A full apology should be nothing less than the Pope’s apology to the Irish in 2018, which included a clear apology for the “crimes” committed by the clergy and church was provided. I hope the words of the apology in Canada will be strong and promote real change. Today was a beginning, but not the end of the need for a full apology. We stand with all residential school survivors and seek real change.”

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer, concluded “The Pope must renounce the doctrine of discovery and the missionary mandate to Christianize First Nations peoples. He must directly involve those that experienced these atrocities and recognize those that didn’t make it home. Respect for our language, culture and identity is not something we need to remind institutions is necessary—these are our fundamental human rights, protected by international and Canadian law. In the period before the Pope comes to Canada, it is necessary that the Canadian Catholic entities fulfill their obligations under the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and fully pay their share that has remained outstanding since Canada let them off the hook in 2016.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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