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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

For Immediate Release
April 28, 2009

BC First Nations leaders in Rome, Italy to meet Pope Benedict XVI on Indian Residential Schools reconciliation

Rome, Italy — Leaders of BC's First Nations are in Rome to attend papal audiences with His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI to discuss the Catholic Church's role in the Indian Residential School system. The first papal audience will include several BC Chiefs, and leaders, in addition to Métis, Inuit and other First Nations leaders from across Canada. A second, private audience has also been scheduled and will include National Chief Phil Fontaine of the Assembly of First Nations and Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit and First Nations Leadership Council.

The audiences will be held on Wednesday, April 29, 2009 at approximately 10:30 AM CEST (1:30 AM PDT). First Nations leaders will also meet the Superior General of the Oblates.

"These audiences represent an unprecedented and historic opportunity to have a dialogue with His Holiness about the Catholic Church's role in the administration and operation of residential schools and the harm inflicted upon generations of aboriginal people across Canada," said Grand Chief Edward John, a member of the political executive of the First Nations Summit and the First Nations Leadership Council.

"Building on last summer's apology from the Government of Canada, we hope the Catholic Church will issue a statement that will further assist survivors in their healing processes and serve as an educational tool supporting reconciliation efforts in Catholic parishes across the province and country," added Grand Chief John.

"I am very pleased for the survivors that this audience is being granted," said BCAFN Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo), "This marks yet another opportunity to turn the page on this dark chapter in our history and move forward with the continued healing of our people."

"I strongly support the AFN's planned Papal visit," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "Without question, this historic visit shall greatly contribute to the vital healing journey of our Indian Residential School Survivors. The survival of our cultures depends on our willingness to move beyond the dark and tragic shadow of the Residential School experience."

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

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

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