

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 30, 2007**

### **First Nations Leadership Council Decry Federal Government Refusal to Issue Apology to Residential School Victims**

**(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver BC)** The BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs call on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to offer an apology to survivors of Indian Residential Schools following inflammatory comments made by Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice.

Minister Prentice recently commented to reporters that the Residential School Settlement will not include an apology to survivors despite recent apologies by Prime Minister Harper for the Chinese head tax and to Maher Arar. He insisted that an apology is not necessary for residential school survivors as the underlying objective was to provide education despite the horrific trauma caused to families, children, and communities.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, "The United Nations' *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* defines acts of genocide including efforts causing serious mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction and/or forcibly transferring children to another group. Residential Schools most definitely contain a genocidal dimension with its efforts to deprive First Nations of their language and culture to assimilate First Nations into so-called mainstream society. Therefore, to suggest that the generations of physical and sexual abuse can be excused under the guise of 'education' is the most astonishingly ludicrous statement I have ever heard a Minister of the Crown make in over my thirty plus years of being involved in Native politics. I would say that an apology is in order."

"I am extremely disappointed with the approach taken by the Conservative government as an apology provides an opportunity for Prime Minister Harper to acknowledge and bring out the abuse and treatment suffered by First Nations children," responded Regional Chief Shawn Atleo, BC Assembly of First Nations. "We all need to move forward, First Nations and Canadians, in healing and reconciling from this tragic legacy and to leave behind an era of mistrust and hurt".

"The federal government's position on this issue is totally unacceptable. It clearly shows a lack of respect and an inability to properly acknowledge the significant pain and trauma suffered by many First Nations people who were forced to attend these government and church run institutions", said Chief Judith Sayers, a member of the First Nations Summit political executive. "We are extremely disappointed that the current government does not understand the significant role an apology would have in the healing and reconciliation process for our people. Government should not expect monetary compensation alone to heal the wounds of the



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residential school system. A formal apology from government is a necessary and critical component to allow our people to move forward from this dark and disturbing time in our history”.

The residential school agreement outlines a framework for an apology from the Government of Canada that would acknowledge the harms caused by the residential school policy and symbolize the rebuilding of relationships between First Nations and Canada.

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