

First Nations Summit

NEWS RELEASE

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“Ring of Reconciliation” an important and permanent symbol for the path to reconciliation

Coast Salish Territory, Victoria, British Columbia – First Nations Summit leaders gathered in Victoria on Monday evening to join the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, the Honourable Judith Guichon, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Premier Christy Clark, the Honourable Judge Steven Point - Xwě lī qwěł těł, Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson, and other dignitaries, to witness His Royal Highness The Duke of Cambridge affix the Ring of Reconciliation to British Columbia’s Black Rod in a ceremony at Government House. The Black Rod is a ceremonial staff created in 2012 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. It is used on formal occasions when the monarch or her provincial representative, the Lieutenant Governor, is present in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit Political Executive delivered the following address at Monday evening’s ceremony;

“This ceremony is about a “reconciliation ring” being affixed to the Black Rod. In this regard, I ask one simple question: “why reconciliation”? The direct answer: “cultural genocide”. This was the “truth” as concluded by Canada’s National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Allow me to explain briefly.

In the mid-1800s colonial authorities, without our ancestors’ knowledge, consent or agreement, unilaterally took all Indigenous lands on behalf of the crown and called it Crown lands. The land became known as “British Columbia”. The fair and equitable resolution of this issue, the “land question” including recognition, restitution, redress and compensation, remains outstanding. Current crown approaches of denial and delay cannot continue. We cannot hope that our future means more litigation or protests on the land. In a constitutional democracy, where the rule of law is an important foundation, we expect more.

When Canada became a country, 150 years ago, it aggressively and wrongly pursued policies and laws to assimilate, civilize and Christianize Indigenous peoples, whose ways of life, teachings, cultures, languages and philosophies were considered “inferior”. Thousands of Indigenous children were, by law, required to attend “Indian residential schools” often in faraway places. I was one of those thousands. The purpose of these schools was to “kill the Indian in the child”. The impacts, including Indigenous language loss, have been deep and now intergenerational.

Despite all this, Indigenous peoples have survived. There is currently a strong and ambitious revival of Indigenous cultural traditions, especially among the youth. The TRC issued 94 recommendations. Canada agreed to implement all of them, starting with the human rights standards in the 46 articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



The Declaration, together with the many important land rights decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, form an important framework for reconciliation and redress. The TRC recommended a new Royal Proclamation for Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Canada agreed to it. 2017 will be an ideal time for this.

Significant commitments have been made by Canada. Indigenous peoples expect to be fully engaged to ensure full and effective implementation. The status quo has not served Indigenous peoples well. We have waited patiently for a long time. We need to proceed with measured urgency. As we know, action speaks louder than words.

Now back to the Reconciliation Ring and the Black Rod. The Black Rod created to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee will now include a "Reconciliation Ring" to represent an ongoing and distinct Royal Family relationship with Indigenous peoples. As well, the Reconciliation Ring on the Black Rod should guide Crown governments and Indigenous peoples to consider the question above and to act together for true and effective reconciliation to deal with the issue of cultural genocide. This is the promise. Thank you"

The First Nations Summit remains committed to reconciliation by engaging in this important dialogue with the Canadian public, and also through the negotiation of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with BC and Canada in our continuing effort to reconcile outstanding Aboriginal Title and Rights in BC, as well as to close the disproportionate socio-economic gaps faced by our communities.

Background

The Ring of Reconciliation symbolizes a step toward reconciliation of all cultures in British Columbia. It is inscribed with Lets'e Mot, meaning "One mind" in the Halq'emeylem language. Two eagle feathers separate the words from an etching of the canoe Shxwtitostel, a gift from former Lieutenant Governor Steven Point to the people of British Columbia.

The Ring of Reconciliation is the fourth and final ring on the Black Rod. There are three additional silver rings near the base of the Black Rod. The rings are inscribed with the motto of the Order of the Garter, the national motto of Canada and the provincial motto of British Columbia.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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