



# FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

## NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release  
December 21, 2006**

### **AN OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER**

#### **FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT CALLS FOR AN APOLOGY TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS**

**Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver, BC** – The First Nations Summit is pleased with the rulings by superior courts in six provinces and the Yukon territory to approve the residential school settlement agreement. Compensation for residential school survivors and a national dialogue of truth and reconciliation on the legacy of this system are long overdue. Reconciliation, however, begins with recognition and acknowledgement of the past – the foundation for rebuilding trust, healing and moving forward in a constructive manner.

“Reconciliation can only truly begin with an apology. We teach the basic lesson to our children that, when wrong, you must “say sorry” in order to continue forward with a relationship, or risk the consequences,” said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit. “For Aboriginal students of residential schools, an apology will acknowledge the wrong suffered by them, validate their long struggle for compensation and redress, and allow them to consider forgiveness.”

BC Supreme Court Chief Justice Donald Brenner, who sat through the emotionally difficult residential school hearings, has recognized the need for an apology, and called upon the Prime Minister to:

*“...give consideration to issuing a full and unequivocal apology on behalf of the people of Canada in the House of Commons. Clearly by committing to these settlement negotiations and by entering into the Settlement Agreement and the ongoing process, Canada has recognized its past failures with respect to the Indian Residential Schools. However, based on what I heard during these hearings and in other residential school litigation, I believe that such an apology would be extremely positive and would assist the objective of all parties in achieving the goal of a national reconciliation.”*

In an open letter to Stephen Harper the First Nations Summit urges the Prime Minister to heed the advice of Chief Justice Brenner, and to publicly apologize for the residential school system in Canada.

"It is baffling to us why Aboriginal peoples in Canada have not received an apology, as Canada has rightfully made to Japanese Canadians for the internment during World War II, and to Chinese Canadians for the head tax," said John, "We are calling upon the Prime Minister to offer an apology to residential school survivors, their families, and their communities as the foundation for moving forward to achieve resolution and reconciliation."

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. Further background information on the Summit may be found at [www.fns.bc.ca](http://www.fns.bc.ca).

For Further Information:

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# FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

December 19, 2006

Hon. Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Right Honourable Prime Minister,

**Re: Residential Schools Settlement Agreement**

We enclose for your review a copy of Mr. Justice Brenner's reasons for judgment in *Quatell v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2006 BCSC 1840, released on December 15, 2006. It is one of seven decisions released on the same day in superior courts in Canadian jurisdictions dealing with the same issues.

In particular we draw your attention to paragraphs 30 - 37 where the reasons deal with issue of an apology to the survivors of residential schools and Aboriginal peoples who have had to live with the "seriously flawed failure" of policies underpinning the establishment and operation of "Indian residential schools".

Mr. Justice Brenner states in paragraphs 35 - 36

"Although I am making no order and I am issuing no directions, I would respectfully request counsel for Canada to ask that the Prime Minister give consideration to issuing a full and unequivocal apology on behalf of the people of Canada in the House of Commons.

Clearly by committing to these settlement negotiations and by entering into the Settlement Agreement and the ongoing process, Canada has recognized its past failures with respect to the Indian Residential Schools. However, based on what I heard during these hearings and in other residential school litigation, I believe that such an apology would be extremely positive and would assist the objective of all parties in achieving the goal of a national reconciliation."

We completely agree with and strongly support Justice Brenner's respectful request for you to consider "issuing a full and unequivocal apology on behalf of the people in Canada in the House of Commons."

We believe, as the government has done for Japanese and Chinese Canadians, it is time for you as the Prime Minister to step up on behalf of Canadians and issue an apology to survivors of Indian residential schools for the devastating consequences arising from the seriously flawed residential schools policies.

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Yours sincerely,  
**FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT TASK GROUP**



Grand Chief Edward John



Chief Judith Sayers



Dave Porter

enclosure      *Reasons for Judgment - Quatell v. Attorney General of Canada, 2006 BCSC 1840*