



# FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **First Nations Leaders travel to meet Qiang Indigenous People in Beichuan, China at the earthquake epicentre**

(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver) — First Nations leaders from British Columbia are on a fact-finding mission supported by the Assembly of First Nations to the earthquake zone in the Chinese province of Sichuan.

The latest total figures available show there are 10 million homeless from the May 12, 2008 earthquake and its aftershocks, which left 68,000 confirmed dead, 80,000 people missing and 360,000 injured.

As relief efforts and rebuilding continue, First Nations are willing to assist the Qiang Indigenous People in Sichuan province, particularly in the area of Mianyang County, including the city of Beichuan, which was heavily damaged by the earthquake. Of the 91,000 people living in Beichuan city 19,000 died. Beichuan city is 100% destroyed and now inaccessible to the public.

Grand Chief Edward John and Chief Dan Smith, political executive members of the BC First Nations Summit and the First Nations Leadership Council met with representatives from the Qiang leadership and members of the provincial and county governments.

Grand Chief Edward John was moved by the determination of the Chinese people to rebuild their lives during this extraordinarily difficult time. Grand Chief John stated, "We visited Beichuan city and saw with our own eyes the immense loss and suffering experienced by the Qiang and other Chinese people. Many of the leaders that are coordinating the relief efforts are still grieving for their family members. While we viewed the most devastated area the Qiang leadership explained the impacts to their city, community, and themselves. It was heartbreaking."

The Chiefs were advised that the Beichuan city will be designated as a memorial site to commemorate those who lost their lives. The city's survivors have been relocated to other areas during reconstruction of the new Beichuan city.

Chief Dan Smith said, "What we witnessed today was one of the world's most devastating disasters with the entire city losing everything, including many children and elders. We will work with the Qiang people to find meaningful and tangible ways in which First Nations in BC can assist to rebuild their lives and communities. We will add our strength with theirs to help rebuild their lives."

First Nations are cooperating with the British Columbia, Canadian and Chinese governments and local authorities in Sichuan province in an effort to coordinate assistance programmes. BC and Canada have provided \$8 million for the earthquake reconstruction, which is being managed by the Forest Innovation Investment (FII) program office in Shanghai. Three small projects are already under consideration including an elders centre in Beichuan city, where the Qiang people reside.

The First Nations leaders also joined meetings in Beijing and Chongqing on the 30th anniversary of the Canada-China Business Council and will attend the upcoming China Mining Forum with an interest in discussing further government and industry support for the Qiang people.

-30-

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

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**Grand Chief Edward John) places flowers at site of Beichuan memorial, watched by Chief Dan Smith (left) and Qiang officials.**



**View of Beichuan devastation from memorial site**