

**Jorge Barrera, Canwest News Service September 30, 2009**

Prime Minister Stephen Harper should apologize for saying Canada has "no history of colonialism," some First Nations leaders say.

The prime minister made the statements during a news conference in Pittsburgh last Friday while talking about the virtues of Canada.

"We also have no history of colonialism," said Harper during the G20 summit news conference in Pittsburgh. "So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them."

While there was no immediate reaction to the statement, the words stuck a nerve among some First Nations leaders who are now demanding the prime minister apologize. They said it contradicted Harper's apology for Indian residential schools and ignored Canada's origins as a colonial creation of the British and French. They also said the Indian Act and conditions on reserves are still living vestiges of Canada's colonial history with First Nations.

"It is not the truth. There should be a retraction for sure and an apology," said Ghislain Picard, grand chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

In a statement, Picard said: "Denying the history of colonialism in Canada is like denying the holocaust."

The Prime Minister's Office said the comments have been taken out of context and misunderstood.

"It was in response to a question from Reuters about Canada's voice and role in the international financial market. Basically, the prime minister was giving some context and saying that unlike past global empires, Canada does not have a history of colonialism with respect to the financial market," said spokeswoman Sara MacIntyre. "Past global empires have implemented policies that are colonial in nature. It was really focused on the international financial scene . . . I think it has been misunderstood and the prime minister stands behind his apology that was made last year."

Conservative Senator Patrick Brazeau, the former head of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, also said the statement had been taken out of context.

"It is important to consider the context of (Harper's) comments last week," said Brazeau in a statement. "The prime minister sought to differentiate Canada's

history with that of past global empires with histories of colonialism. (Harper's) apology for the tragedy of Indian residential schools last year clearly acknowledge the wrong doings and racist policies of Canada's past."

Canada's leading native organization, the Assembly of First Nations, the national arm, did not return requests for comment.

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Grand Chief Ron Evans said he wanted to hear the AFN's new leader Shawn Atleo speak out about the issue. Evans said he was writing a letter to the prime minister about the matter.

"I am just shocked that someone would say something like that knowing the history of their own country," said Evans. "They tried to destroy a race of people."

Michael Cachagee, executive director of National Residential School Survivors Society, said the prime minister's statement undercut last year's seminal residential school apology.

"This man speaks with a forked tongue," said Cachagee. "He has mud on his face on this one. Colonial pie."

During the apology delivered last June, Harper never mentioned colonialism, but Evans referred to one passage he said offered a textbook example of colonialism.

Harper said: "Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal."

*With a file from Reuters*

**Here is Harper's full statement as quoted by Reuters:**

"Canada remains in a very special place in the world . . . We are the one major developed country that no one thinks has any responsibility for this crisis . . . In fact, on the contrary, they look at our policies as a solution to the crisis. We're the one country in the room everybody would like to be . . . We're so self-effacing as Canadians that we sometimes forget the assets we do have that other people see . . . We are one of the most stable regimes in history . . . We are unique in that regard . . . We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of

the things that threaten or bother them."  
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