

Apology to Indian Residential School Survivors

Open Letter from Ted Quewezance to the Prime Minister

SAULT STE. MARIE, ON, June 3 /CNW/ - Ted

Quewezance, Executive Director of the National Residential School Survivors' Society published an open letter to Prime Minister Harper.

This letter, Mr. Quewezance says is written out of the deepest respect to our leadership, in the hope that reconciliation is achieved for all parties.

Following is Ted Quewezance letter:

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

On behalf of the Residential School Survivors of Canada, we welcome your announcement of an apology. Residential School Survivors have waited patiently for decades to hear the Government of Canada acknowledge what was done and the profound impact on survivors, our families and our communities. We acknowledge that it is your prerogative to speak for all Canadians; however, as you ponder what you will say, we want you to know first hand what we expect.

We write this open letter because we want you to hear our voice and know that your words will have an intense impact on reconciliation. We know that "...no apology means no reconciliation."

It is with deep respect, we boldly put forward what survivors expect in the apology."

1. Survivors expect Canada to recognize what was done was wrong and Canada accepts TOTAL responsibility for what they did to survivors and their families and their communities. Canada acknowledges that the impact on survivors and their families has been physical, emotional, mental and spiritual and has resulted in the destruction of our families and communities.
2. We expect Canada to make a sincere public expression of sorrow for what they have done. The apology must be sincere and recognize how terrible the experience was for survivors and knowingly Canada continued the operation of residential schools when they knew these were issues and concerns. Each month for decades there were reports and letters expressing concerns and described the physical, emotional and sexual abuse, but these concerns were totally ignored.
3. Canada must stop what they have done, and what they are doing to survivors and their families in our communities today. Canada must abandon the policies, rules and activities that continue re-victimizing survivors. The abuse has to stop and Canada must

direct the forces that continue these activities to cease.

4. Canada must confess publicly what they did to each survivor. Survivors were 'kidnapped' from their families, they were 'imprisoned' in institutions which had little or no respect for human dignity. Children were beaten, humiliated, starved, introduced to contagious diseases like tuberculosis, sexually abused, some people died under questionable circumstances in an environment whose goal was to "...take the Indian out of the child."

Most in the world would call what was done 'cultural genocide.' What would be appropriate is an apology letter sent to each survivor from the Prime Minister confessing and asking forgiveness for what was done.

5. Canada must make restitution - Canada must put back what was taken away by committing to rebuilding individuals, families and communities. Canada needs to recognize that the Settlement Agreement does not compensate the pain and suffering, but it is only a small token to acknowledge this travesty. Canada needs to acknowledge that it may take a number of generations for First Nation, Métis and Inuit families to recover and Canada will NOT "...wash their hands" of what they did. The commitment is to do all they can to make things right.
6. Canada has an obligation to reconcile and ask forgiveness for what they did as perpetrators of these terrible acts. Canada's obligation to reconcile means that survivors also need the capacity to also reconcile and forgive. Healing is easier said, than done and the desire to reconcile and ask forgiveness is the beginning of a process where others will also need to reconcile and ask for forgiveness.
7. Canada needs to commit that it will never, never, never let this happen again.

Anything less than the above is not in our view a sincere apology, and will not be accepted by most of the survivors, their families and their communities. Anything less will not be an expression of reconciliation.

Once again, we welcome the announcement of the apology and applaud your decision to acknowledge a part of Canadian history that many deny was as intense as it was or even happened. It is with profound gratitude that we encourage you to hear our voice.

All my relations;

Ted Quewezance, Executive Director

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