



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

507-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-922-7733
Fx: 604-922-7433



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

500-342 Water Street
Vancouver, BC
V6B 1B6

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Comments from the First Nations Leadership Council regarding today's federal Speech from the Throne

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver – The First Nations Leadership Council, while pleased with the federal government's commitment to issue an apology to the Residential School survivors as well as the commitment to the creation of an independent specific claims body, sees many gaps in today's Speech from the Throne.

"The First Nations Leadership Council and many other First Nations organizations have long called for an apology from the federal government as a necessary part of the healing and reconciliation process for the victims of the government and church run residential school system", said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit. "This apology will be a critical component in allowing our people to move forward from this dark, disturbing and painful time in our history. The First Nations Leadership Council looks forward to more details on the nature, content and timing of the apology".

Grand Chief John, a residential school survivor and one of the early First Nations activists in BC to get both governments and churches to deal with residential school abuses, also paid special recognition to all the residential school survivors who bravely launched court cases which ultimately brought the governments and churches to the table and laid the groundwork for today's announcement of a pending apology.

BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo) is encouraged by the promises the Conservative Government has made regarding First Nations issues in the Speech from the Throne. "As the Harper Government sets its agenda for the coming session of parliament, First Nations people see a tremendous opportunity to see further progress on important issues", he said, "I am especially pleased to see a commitment to introduce Specific Claims Legislation."

Since July of this year, Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo) has served as Co-chair of the Specific Claims Task Force. Working in conjunction with Canadian representatives the task force has sought ways to develop specific claims legislation and reforms that will introduce much needed independence and impartiality into the specific claims resolution process. At the time the task force was struck, First Nations across Canada expressed cautious optimism at an effort to bring a new approach to resolving specific land claims. It is hoped new legislation would help reduce the current backlog of over 1000 claims (50% of which are in BC).

“If you have heard one Federal Throne Speech, you have heard them all. All they are is a collection of warm fuzzy commitments and political posturing. The time for political poetry is over. First Nations communities are in desperate need of concrete, tangible results”, said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Given the unprecedented budget surpluses, there is no good reason why the Government of Canada can not immediately commit to a process of true reconciliation of Aboriginal Title and respect for our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights”.

“We call on Canada to identify in the upcoming budget increased funding for programs protecting women and children from violence – lest we forget the many missing and murdered women of the Highway of Tears and from Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Canada should also reconsider its limited approach to specific claims by truly reflecting the real-world value of the lands lost in their offers of resolution”, added Grand Chief Phillip.

The First Nations Leadership Council will be looking to the next federal budget as a stronger indication on whether the current federal government will step up to address the desperate and deplorable socio-economic circumstances faced by our communities.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

For more information please contact:

Grand Chief Edward John
Political Executive, First Nations Summit: 778-772-8218

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President, UBCIC: 250-490-5314

Regional Chief Shawn Atleo
BC Assembly of First Nations: 604-220-5822

Colin Braker
Communications Director Office: 604-926-9903
First Nations Summit: Cell: 604-328-4094