

APC & the Indian Residential School Issue

by Georgianna Barlow
APC

While survivors across Canada are awaiting the nine court decisions on the Final Settlement Agreement that includes compensation, advance payment to elderly, truth and reconciliation, commemoration and changes to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Process, I thought that I would take this time to fill readers in on the Indian Residential School work undertaken by the Atlantic Policy Congress.

Background

In November of 2004, the 35 Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy Chiefs mandated the Atlantic Policy Congress to provide outreach and information to Atlantic survivors so that they would be aware of the latest issues and negotiations taking place. The goal of the APC is to organize, facilitate and encourage dialogue on options that are available for Indian Residential school survivors, one being the Alternative Dispute Resolution Process. The APC are currently in their second year of delivering outreach sessions to Mi'kmaq and Maliseet survivors and the general public on the Indian Residential school issue in Canada.

Outreach sessions



(L-R) Stan Francis, Charmaine Kaye and Mary Moore Phillips, Mental Health service providers for Indian Residential School survivors from Health Canada.

Photo by Georgianna Barlow

The objections of the APC outreach sessions are:

- To organize, facilitate, and encourage dialogue on the issues facing residential school survivors.
- Present options available to survivors to achieve reconciliation.
- Provide updated information on progress to date, i.e. Agreement in Principle.

Stephen Christmas of Membertou First Nation has also attended these sessions to help First Nation elders understand the Final Settlement Agreement by speaking in the Mi'kmaq language. To date, the APC has conducted 27 outreach sessions with the Atlantic communities.

Wills and Estates

Presentations have also been made at APC outreach

sessions on wills and estates by Zella Burke of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Ms. Burke discusses why it's important for First Nations people to have a will and the process of properly filling out a will. Ms. Burke will continue to give presentations and workshops on wills to all of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet communities.

APC Atlantic Survivors Database System

Since the APC staff began conducting information sessions with communities, a database form has been handed out to survivors and former boarding school students. The database form requests their names, addresses and phone numbers. The reason for the database forms are to

record the number of survivors living in the Atlantic and to also mail out the latest information to survivors. By having the information database, survivors could also be contacted for any upcoming meetings in communities and regionally. Since forms are coming into the APC office daily, the current numbers of survivors and former boarding school students on the database system are approximately 400 from both the Atlantic and the United States.

Information kiosks

An integral component of the public education campaign as well as reaching survivors who live off-reserve has involved setting up a Treaty information booth (kiosk) at various conferences and

events. This is an excellent venue to distribute information on the Indian Residential School issue. To date, we have set up information kiosks at the following conferences and events:

- International First Nations Community Planning Conference/Investment Fair, Membertou First Nation, May 23rd-25th
- HEARTS of a Nation Gathering, Listuguj First Nation, June 21st-23rd
- APC All Chiefs and Council Meeting, Dartmouth, N.S. September 26th to 27th
- APC Health Conference, Dartmouth, N.S., October 17th, 18th & 19th

APC Residential School Website

Information on the Indian Residential School

issue can also be found on the APC website at www.apcnc.ca. The information includes press releases on the issue as new developments arise, updates on negotiations between the AFN and the Federal Government such as the Political Agreement, the Agreement in Principle, the advance payment forms and the Final Settlement Agreement. Residential school articles written monthly in the Mi'kmaq Maliseet News can also be found on the website.

Crime Prevention Strategy

The Atlantic First Nation communities as well as urban centers, where First Nations reside, could be facing a high increase of crime related problems and mental health issues. The Crime Prevention Strategy is concerned with protecting all of the Atlantic communities. This strategy will be looking to take a proactive approach with the RCMP and re-gaining trust. Currently, the Crime Prevention Strategy is meeting on a monthly basis to gain further knowledge on the issue and what can be done in order to promote education and awareness in First Nation communities. Survivors also let the APC know of the current problems faced in their communities, especially when it comes to the elderly

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Kelowna Accord Bill Passes Second Reading

OTTAWA, Oct. 19 - Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine said First Nations across Canada are pleased by the outcome of yesterday's vote in the House of Commons on Bill C-292, an Act to Implement the Kelowna Accord. The Bill passed at second reading and was referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs.

"All First Nations were eagerly anticipating the passage of Bill C-292 at second reading and we are very pleased that the Bill

was unanimously supported by all of the opposition parties in the House of Commons. It is now clear to us and to all Canadians that the majority of their elected representatives support the outcomes of the First Ministers Meeting on Aboriginal issues that was held in Kelowna last November," said National Chief Fontaine. "First Nations were disappointed to see the current minority government vote against Bill C-292, despite its earlier public statements that it supports the targets

and objectives agreed to in Kelowna that are designed to close the gap in quality of life between our people and the rest of Canadians within ten years," added National Chief Fontaine.

The First Nations plan that was agreed to at the First Ministers Meeting in Kelowna is achievable and affordable. It sets out realistic goals with measurable targets. All governments and Aboriginal organizations spent eighteen months prior to the meeting developing the plan and working

together in order to achieve a consensus. The final product was a comprehensive ten year plan to close the gap between Aboriginal people and other Canadians that was unanimously endorsed by every province and territory, the federal government, and all Aboriginal leaders.

National Chief Fontaine elaborated further, saying, "Yesterday, again, we saw the majority of elected representatives in the House of Commons vote in favour of the Kelowna agreement.

First Nations need and deserve it to be fully implemented. We cannot afford to lose another generation. This is a national crisis that all governments agreed must be addressed immediately."

"First Nations peoples wish to thank all of the Members of the House of Commons who voted in support of the First Nations plan. We believe that there is now an opportunity for all Members of all parties to join with us in tackling the number one social injustice in Canada- First Nations

poverty. We encourage all Governments of Canada to continue to work with us to implement the solutions needed to solve the poverty crisis," concluded National Chief Fontaine.

The Assembly of First Nations is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.

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