



Ref. 52918

July 8, 2021

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President  
Chief Don Tom, Vice-President  
Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer  
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs  
209-345 Chief Alex Thomas Way  
Kamloops BC V2H 1H1  
*Via email to:* [andrea@ubcic.bc.ca](mailto:andrea@ubcic.bc.ca)

Dear Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Don Tom, and Kukpi7 Judy Wilson:

Thank you for your letter of July 6, 2021. I am grateful for the opportunity to have engaged with the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs leadership at the June 30, 2021 Chiefs' Council meeting on the matter of the provincial government's response to the revelations from Kamloops and other residential school sites in British Columbia.

As referenced at the meeting, the provincial government recently announced \$12 million to support First Nation-led strategies to identify, investigate, document, maintain, protect and commemorate former residential school sites, as well as to provide cultural and wellness supports for communities, survivors, and intergenerational survivors experiencing trauma from residential school site findings.

I fully share your view that this funding be made available directly, on a government-to-government basis, and with full transparency. We are working closely with the federal government to ensure these resources are coordinated with existing funding and easy to access for those communities ready to carry out this important work. As we design this process, we welcome the opportunity to meet with the First Nations Leadership Council, including the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, to make sure we are responsive to and incorporate the input from recent engagements with First Nations leadership.

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I also appreciate the opportunity to address the 1998 memo you referenced in your letter.

As the modern treaty process was getting started in B.C. more than 20 years ago, we explored many avenues for how we could successfully reach treaties. Addressing the effects of residential schools was an issue that was front and centre in treaty negotiations with a number of First Nations at that time.

In my work as a treaty negotiator in the 1990s, I worked with Nuu-chah-nulth leaders, including the late George Watts, to appropriately acknowledge in the agreement the horrific legacy of residential schools. In 1997, one year after the last residential school closed, the federal government established a fund for "community-based wellness projects" to support healing. That funding did not include compensation to individual survivors, which did not come for another decade in 2007 when settlements were reached regarding the residential school system. Our goal in the treaty negotiations was to secure as much federal funding as possible for the Nuu-chah-nulth, who had advocated strongly that any agreement had to include much-needed funding to support community projects that promoted healing.

When the memo was written in 1998, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had not yet completed its work and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was still in development. Like many non-Indigenous Canadians, I was not aware of the full scope of the atrocities, violence, and suffering of the residential school system, and the intergenerational trauma it continues to perpetrate.

I deeply apologize for the hurt that my words in the 1998 memo have caused to Indigenous peoples. The memo included language that I now know is not appropriate and that I do not support today. I take responsibility for the memo and I am sorry to have added to the stress and trauma of this acutely painful time for residential school survivors, their families and communities.

My focus as Minister remains to uphold the human rights of Indigenous peoples and to confront the legacy of colonialism, including residential schools, that we must address urgently in British Columbia and Canada. I am fully committed to advancing this critical work, as guided and directed by First Nations in B.C.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Murray Rankin, QC  
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation