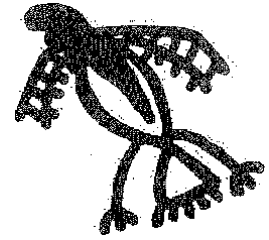


# Neskonlith Indian Band

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## Neskonlith Council Response to Statement from Pope Francis on Residential School System

Last week, many of our Secwépemc Peoples, who are residential school survivors, were triggered by the extensive media coverage that included images and videos of the Indigenous Peoples' delegations who went to the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis to ask him for an apology for the Catholic Church's role in the genocidal abuses that happened at Canadian residential schools.

Our Council was also triggered watching the news reports, as we remembered the federal government's **Indian Act** policy towards hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children who were removed from their homes and families and forced to attend the residential schools and those children who didn't make it home from the Kamloops and the St. Joseph's (Williams Lake) Residential Schools situated on Secwépemcul'ecw.

Canada's Residential Schools are where international crimes against humanity occurred. These Residential School sites with mass graves, as far as we are concerned, are crime scenes.

It is with this history in mind, we measured the words of the April 1, 2022, statement made by Pope Francis, spoken to about 100 Indigenous delegates crowded into a room at the Vatican in Rome, Italy, far from Turtle Island.

We appreciate that for some Residential School Survivors, particularly those who were in the room with the Pope when he delivered his remarks, that his saying the words "*I am very sorry*", are a first step towards the start of their healing.

Regrettably, Pope Francis only apologized for "*the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values. All these things are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ...[and f]or the deplorable conduct of these members of the Catholic Church, I ask for God's forgiveness and I want to say to you with all my heart: I am very sorry.*"

Pope Francis did not apologize for the role of the Catholic Church in implementing federal **Indian Act** policy, through the operation of the Roman Catholic Church's Residential Schools in Canada, he apologized for the individual Catholics, such as the priests and nuns who committed the abuses on Indigenous Children.

Pope Francis also did not mention revoking the *Inter Caetera* papal bull of May 4, 1493, otherwise known as the Doctrine of Discovery, which has resulted in the domination, dehumanization and genocide of our Indigenous Nations through the Residential School system and the theft of our lands by Christian states.

It is timely that three highly respected Indigenous women from Turtle Island, including one of Canada's most celebrated actors, Crystle Lightning, have come together to create a documentary about the devastating impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery. The premiere of the *Doctrine of Recovery* will

coincide with the Pope's proposed visit to Canada. The film is a powerful reminder of how the Doctrine of Discovery is at the very foundation of systemic and institutionalized racism that our people continue to be marginalized by, and how the roots of so many tragic issues impacting First Nations' communities today, like the Murdered and Missing crisis, began with the imposition of the *Inter Caetera* papal bull of May 4, 1493.

Neskonlith Council has had several members contact our office and others directly, some take it to heart that they feel the Pope apologized by saying the words "*I am very sorry*", others say they do not want anything to do with the Pope, even if he apologized.

Our Council understands that for the atrocities our members and family underwent at the Residential Schools, the Pope must reach out to them firsthand, with a full and meaningful apology, but importantly the Pope must fully acknowledge the churches role in the Residential Schools and its subjugation of Indigenous Peoples especially for the children who did not come home and the Justice they deserve.

It is hoped that upon the Holy See's visit to Canada in July, he will clarify his apology and expand on what actions the Catholic Church will take, to admit its culpability and accountability in managing the Roman Catholic Residential Schools.

Therefore, our Council stands with those who do not accept the April 1, 2022, non-apology of Pope Francis. We will wait to see if he expands on his remarks during his expected visit to Canada later this year.