

Indigenous Leaders Discuss Expectations for Pope's Visit to Canada to Address Residential School Atrocities

Pope is expected to reiterate an apology for the Catholic Church's role in the "deplorable abuses" at Canadian Residential Schools.

OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA, June 24, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Anti-Racism Initiative of the [G20 Interfaith Forum](#), the world's leading organization focused on the intersection of faith and policy, is gathering experts from the Indigenous communities of Canada to discuss the Pope's upcoming trip to Canada in late July, where he is expected to reiterate an apology for the Catholic Church's role in the "deplorable abuses" at Canadian Residential Schools.



Ja:no's—Janine Bowen, who will moderate the discussion, said many of Canada's Indigenous People expect more than an apology:

"While the Pope apologized for abuses at residential schools, he fell short of taking responsibility for the role of the wider institution when he denounced the conduct of some members of the Catholic Church," Bowen said. "Moreover, the apology did not address the issue of compensation, document disclosure or the extradition and prosecution of those known to have participated in abuse."

Nearly three-quarters of Canada's 130 residential schools were run by Catholic missionary congregations, and Indigenous children experienced emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse at the hands of school administrators and staff. During Canada's 50-year effort to assimilate Native children, graveyards were a standard feature at residential schools—with thousands of children dying from disease, fires caused by nonexistent safety standards, and abuse.

Rick Hill, Citizen of the Tuscarora Nation, said the Church has been dragging its feet in addressing this issue:

“The Catholic Church has been reluctant to admit their role in the Residential School system of abuse,” Hill said. “Church officials blamed the devil for causing people to suggest that Catholic clergy would commit such sins. Then, the Church said that to settle all the cases would bankrupt the Church and cause many parishes to close. The Church begged off their court-ordered settlement to address the legacy of abuse that Catholics caused innocent Indigenous children. Now, an apology is supposed to make up for all that. More is needed to bring justice to this long-standing matter.”

Gerry Oleman of the St’at’imc Nation said that the issue has brought up strong feelings in Indigenous communities:

“This topic has been divisive amongst some of my people,” Oleman said. “One example is that some were critical of those that went to Rome to ask for an apology, stating that the abused should not have to ask for an apology.”

Carmen Lansdowne of the Heiltsuk First Nation and Ellen Gabriel of the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation said they hope that this visit will address issues on a systemic and structural level:

“My hope is that when the Pope visits Canada later this year, he makes a formal apology on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church to survivors,” Lansdowne said. “The apology needs to not just be about the actions of the priests, nuns, and other Catholic residential school staff, but for the systemic design and generational legacies of the school as a tool of colonization, oppression, and cultural genocide. Then the apology needs to be backed up with tangible amends, like making whole on the financial reparations and the release of all the archival documents set out in the Settlement Agreements.”

“Nothing is going to fundamentally change until the exploitative, imperialistic system that helped inform the decision to strip Indigenous people of their culture—which we are still living with today—is replaced with something more human-focused and community-driven,” Gabriel said.

The virtual meeting will take place on June 27, 2022 at 2 pm EST, and will aim to accomplish three things:

1. Discuss the continued struggle of Indigenous peoples to overcome the institutional racism embedded within the policies and edicts put forth by the Catholic Church.
2. Discuss the next steps the Catholic Church and/or the Canadian government should take to affect meaningful change that will positively impact Indigenous communities in Canada.
3. Start a conversation about actions religious organizations can take to develop educational institutions that embrace healing and well-being rooted in faith, while demonstrating a respect of indigenous cultures and spiritual traditions.

Register for the free webinar at

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4QPMmGBATDGM9W5TC2XwZg

Speakers will include experts from various Indigenous groups in Canada:

- J̄:no's—Janine Bowen – Allegany Territory Language Director at the Seneca Nation; Member of the Beaver Clan of the Seneca Nation
- Ellen Gabriel – Citizen of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation; Indigenous rights, human rights, and environmental advocate
- Rick Hill – Citizen of the Tuscarora Nation; Artist, writer, and museum curator
- Carmen Lansdowne – Member of the Heiltsuk First Nation; Theologist and former Executive Committee Member of the World Council of Churches (WCC)
- Gerry Oleman – Citizen of the St'at'imc Nation from Tsal'alh (Shalalth, BC); Change agent for First Nations communities

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The G20 Interfaith Forum seeks global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives to help shape the overall G20 agenda. It draws on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting a rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. Through its extensive network of networks, it helps prioritize key global policy goals and point toward practical means of implementation at every level of society.

For more information, please visit www.g20interfaith.org.

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