

Forum Summary Apology for Historical Wrongs Against Chinese British Columbians Consultation Forum Kamloops, BC

Thursday, December 19, 2013

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Coast Kamloops Hotel & Conference Centre
1250 Rogers Way, Kamloops, BC V1S 1N5



Lead: Honourable Teresa Wat, Minister of International Trade
and Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism

Host: **Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association (KCCA)**

Facilitator: Joe Leong – President of Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association (KCCA)

Attendance: 40 people

Agenda

1. Joe Leong – Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Minister Teresa Wat – Opening Remarks
3. Mark Seeley – Consultation Questions and Process
4. Comments from community members
5. Minister Teresa Wat – Closing Remarks and Thank you
6. Joe Leong – Closing Remarks

Joe Leong Opening Remarks

- Everyone was welcomed and attendees were thanked for attending the forum in Kamloops despite the busy time of year and were encouraged to share their ideas and feedback with Minister Teresa Wat
- Acknowledged the attendance of key people and groups for the forum including the Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association and its Directors; the Taiwanese Association; the Multi-cultural Association; Thompson Rivers University students including students from both China and Hong Kong; and specific individuals who came to participate
- Mr. Leong then introduced Minister Teresa Wat

Minister Teresa Wat Opening Remarks

- Minister Wat welcomed all in attendance and introduced herself; acknowledged the work of Joe Leong and the Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association in hosting the forum; expressed appreciation for people taking the time to come to the event despite the busy season.
- Commented on how the Chinese community have long been a part of the fabric of BC; helped build B.C., helped build the railway but faced discrimination and exclusion; at one point there were 17,000 Chinese labourers working on the railway and yet when the last railway tie was laid, there were no Chinese workers present.
- Kamloops has a special connection in the history of Chinese Canadians; Peter Wing was the first Chinese mayor in North America and he became the President of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.
- The consultation process is a journey; while we can not undo the past, we can help children for the future.

Minister Wat concluded by stating that while we can't undo the past, we can leave a legacy, reflect and move forward.

Mark Seeley Consultation Questions and Process

- Mr. Mark Seeley expressed how honoured he is to be in Kamloops; he introduced the Ministry of International Trade and then described the overall consultation process.
- People were able to use a translator if they wished; the session would be recorded and a summary would be posted on the EmbraceBC website; with a two hour slot people would be allowed 2-3 minutes to speak and if not comfortable speaking people could also write on the feedback forms provided or send their thoughts via e-mail.

Community Members

- The process would start by addressing one question at a time in the following order:
 1. The wording of the apology.
 2. Who and how the apology should be delivered?
 3. What is the legacy of this apology?

Del Turner

Past President of Multi-cultural Association

- Mr. Turner expressed how important it is that young people understand what happened; that we acknowledge the importance of awareness of our history.
- Mr. Turner spoke of the discrimination that the Chinese faced including the Head Tax, denied the right to vote, exposed to verbal abuse and derogatory names, forced to live in sub-standard and unsafe conditions; he recounted a story of how his grandfather was the fire chief in Victoria and witnessed a fire in Chinatown that killed many people because of the conditions they were forced to live in.
- Commented on the importance of education for the people of Kamloops on this history – possibly through the establishment of a museum.

Bill Sandhu

Lawyer

- Mr. Sandhu opened by expressing how he was reluctant to speak before his Chinese friends had spoken; introduced himself as being of Indian origin born in Canada.
- Mr. Sandhu spoke about how he felt Canada has not been truthful in acknowledging its historic systemic discrimination of different people including Japanese, Chinese and African people ; that Asians have contributed so much to building the country but it has not been recognized.
- B.C. has an overt history of racist legislation in the Exclusion Act; Chinese were not just subjected to the Head Tax but were in fact considered a secondary type of human being.
- Mr. Sandhu expressed scepticism about the apology and the impact it will have; it is necessary that we recognize the truth and not expect a quick apology to heal what has happened; money paid to the descendants alone is not enough; Pointed that millions of dollars have been spent to celebrate and educate the public about the War of 1812 and World War II
- Mr. Sandu also expressed that he felt the legacy of this exclusionary legislation is still present in today's society and the government and the power structure are still dominated by whiteness and that exclusion is still a very real issue in today's society.
- Wants full commitment to education about the past and recognition that the Asian community has historically and currently contributed a great deal in building the province of B.C.; that for over 100 years there has been exclusion and that we should incorporate this history into school curriculum.

Community Members (continued)

- Mr. Sandhu stated it should not just be the Premier or the Minister; it should not be on behalf of the government but rather on the behalf of the people of British Columbia, the descendants of the founders of British Columbia as this issue is about us collectively.
- Mr. Sandhu expressed that history is a narrative that is not always accurate; it's important that we speak the truth when discussing historical events.
- The legacy needs to be in the education system; it needs to be something long term that needs commitment over the long term; time and money.
- Barkerville could be promoted better with a section dedicated to the Chinese working there; Knowledge network programming to create show or documentary; maybe some work with the CBC federal body.
- Mr. Sandhu asked what is the timeline and are we going to do it

Ken, a Chinese student from Thompson River University

- Introduced himself as a student from China and commented that most Chinese people do not know much about the history of the Chinese community in B.C.; many Chinese people died building Canada.
- Suggested that we remember these people through possibly setting a holiday to dedicate to them; also introduce a history class at the university.

Nancy McGovern (nee Wong)

Citizen

- Mrs. McGovern expressed that she had not planned to speak, but was moved to on behalf of her grandparents; three of her four grandparents came to Canada over 100 years ago landing in Victoria, moved east to Toronto and then later settled in Manitoba.
- Mrs. McGovern is involved in research on Manitoba and she expressed that the Chinese in Manitoba had an easier time than those in B.C.
- Mrs. McGovern's family was directly affected by the Head Tax; lived with her grandparents; her grandmother is white and her grandparents married in 1914 one year after the Exclusion Act was introduced; this brought 23 years of exclusion and had a direct impact on her grandparents and their lives in Canada.
- Apology does not right the wrongs; it is important for people to know why an apology is needed; there is a lack of understanding amongst Canadians and recent immigrants about this history and its legacy .
- Mrs. McGovern asked if this an initiative for B.C. only or nationally? 2006 apology is formalized by PM Stephen Harper.
- Pointed that there is a human rights museum in Winnipeg; there seems to be much discussion about museum here.
- Is there any effort to unite the country?
- Also important to think of Hell's Gate, China Bar and the significance of the those areas to the history of Chinese workers on the railway.

Joe Leong

President of Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association

- Mr. Leong reads from a submission from the Kamloops Chinese Cultural Association (KCCA).
- Thanked the Minister for coming to Kamloops to consult the Kamloops Chinese Canadian Community on this important issue.

Community Members (continued)

- The KCCA is a non-profit organization formed in 1977 and were the founders of the organization now known as the Kamloops Immigrant Services; the Chinese presence in Kamloops is a long one with the Kamloops Chinese Freemasons Association (KCFA) as one of the oldest Chinese organization dating back to 1895; many of its members were buried at the Chinese cemetery in the city known today as the Kamloops Chinese Heritage Cemetery; this is maintained by the KCCA, the KCFA and the City of Kamloops.
- Over 17,000 Chinese railway workers were officially recognized in 1982 for their contributions to the building of the CPR in B.C. in 1880 to 1885; they were also subjected to deep discrimination and racism such as the Head Tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act once they were considered no longer needed in the country.
- Many of these labourers either died on the railway or died as lonely men once the railway was completed and then buried without names
- The Chinese Community accepts the Government of B.C.'s acknowledgement of the legislated racism and discrimination faced by the Chinese community in the 1800's and 1900's, and we accept the acknowledgement the Government of B.C. initiated and influenced the federal government's enactment of federal discriminatory policies.
- It is important to recognized that dominant groups have power to enact their discriminatory beliefs through policies that then have real impact of the lives of people; we commend the government for taking steps to address these past wrongs and believe that it has tremendous power in shaping public attitudes toward cultural differences, and sends a strong message that racism of any kind can never be justified.
- The KCCA recommends that a museum dedicated Chinese British Columbians be created to collect and archive necessary material to educate youth; an apology would not be meaningful without some substantive legacy for our future generations.
- Mr. Leong stated that he represents two Chinese associations: Chinese Cultural Association and the Chinese Cremation Association; they both feel the premier should make the formal apology.
- Suggested that Minister Wat introduce the motion supported by all parties in the house; maybe invite people affected by the Head Tax; have a delegation to uphold symbolic meaning; the apology could be a CBC radio broadcast and that there also be and educational legacy.
- Points out that these are historical landmarks; there could be tours for these areas
- Mr. Leong then read from another statement on behalf of the KCCA regarding the history of Chinese workers in Kamloops.
- Kamloops has a long history of Chinese people living and working in the area; in 1892 over one third of the population in Kamloops was Chinese; also Peter Wing was the first Chinese mayor in North America.
- Chinese were mining for gold as far back as 1858 and then over 10,000 arrived between 1880-1885 to build the railway; the Chinese only cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Kamloops dating back to the 1860's.
- Both the provincial government and the local municipal government have at times recognized the importance of contributions of the Chinese community in B.C.; the KCCA believes there is a great deal of knowledge and material to build a lasting educational legacy about the Chinese people who suffered from racism and discrimination in the 1800's and 1900's.

Community Members (continued)

- Words are not enough; there needs to be a legacy piece to educate people and future generations about the past; discussion of monuments have been presented in the past but the Chinese community feels that there are too many belated monuments and plaques and that they are not sufficient; the community wants something more meaningful.
- A museum dedicated to Chinese Canadians could be educational; but also more investment in cultural tourism in different parts of B.C. as is done in other countries; restoring communities cultural heritage and then developing a cultural tourism promotion around B.C. or abroad.
- It is important to note that much of this known history is in fact missing from history books; it is important that this history is preserved and shared widely for all British Columbians to learn about; Kamloops has a great deal of this history within its city limits; we encourage the government to restore Kamloops as centre for historical destination and cultural learning about how Chinese Canadians helped build Canada.

Joanna Maxwell Citizen

- Mrs. Maxwell commented that actions speak louder than words, that we should educate young people.

Yaying Zhang Citizen

- Asked who will actually deliver the apology? Words are not enough but rather attitude and actions are more important; the government should make substantial measure to implement change in schools or build a museum so the structure of Canadian history can be brought to life

Ling Hong Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society

- Ms. Hong suggested a heritage festival in Kamloops for children to find out the truth; needs to be an initiative where different groups work together; education for all is important and we need to emphasize our multicultural-ness, learn about what happened to prevent it from ever happening again; needs to be embedded into our system; it's not just about the CPR – it is still happening!
- Government needs to hear our voices and we need to encourage the government to say something; it is not just about mistakes made 100 years ago but also about mistakes being made now.
- There is a train everyday in Kamloops; have holiday to recognize the contributions to the CPR; also museum and school education are important.

Lyle

- Mr. Lyle commented that there should be an official apology; that a museum display could be a legacy; that there should be discussion about what caused this in the first place.
- There has been a study conducted by UBC on the Head Tax for educational purposes; excellent contributions by the families involved in the study and excellent research for educational material.

**Community
Members
(continued)**

- A museum with a permanent display to show different aspects of Chinese community in B.C.; many things that the public don't think about such as Chinese herding cattle, or seeking gold and jade; not just the railway.
- Also there is the Heritage Cemetery which does not receive any funding.

**Linda Wong
Citizen**

- Ms. Wong commented that a museum seems appropriate.

**Minister
Teresa Wat
Closing Remarks**

- Working with other provinces would be a lengthy process; this initiative is intended for just B.C.
- The Minister stated that they hope to bring a motion forward in the Spring sitting of the Legislature.
- By the end of January the consultations will be completed and then they will draft a report; this will give them time to give thought to the future.

**Joe Leong
Closing Remarks**

- Mr. Leong wrapped up the meeting by summarizing some of the highlights including museum, education and inclusion and then ended the meeting with some closing remarks.