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An Encounter with His Holiness Pope Francis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Denendeh, Northwest Territories - October 28, 2021] – Ongoing advocacy by the AFN, pressing for a formal apology from His Holiness Pope Francis, has resulted in an invitation to encounter the Vatican in December of 2021, and an announcement from the Canadian Bishops that Pope Francis will encounter Canada, “in the context of a pilgrimage of healing and reconciliation with our Indigenous sisters and brothers.”

In 2015, the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution expressing their support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s 94 Calls to Action . This includes *Call to Action #58* which calls upon the Pope Francis to make a formal apology to survivors of Indian Residential Schools.

In 2018, the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution directing the National Chief of Canada and the Executive Committee to continue to pursue a full apology from the Pope for the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Indian Residential School system.

AFN Regional Chiefs have agreed to accept this invitation from his Holiness Pope Francis and have selected delegates from across Canada to represent their region on this encounter. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops will cover the expenses of Indigenous Delegates.

“As AFN Portfolio Holder for Residential Schools, and Regional Chief for the Northwest Territories, I will lead Indian Residential School survivors, as part of this delegation. It is an honour to receive an invitation from his Holiness Pope Francis to have an encounter with him. This gesture shows respect to the Indigenous peoples of Canada”. – Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya

“Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interests of the Dene Nation”



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National Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

TRC CTA #58

We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada.

TRC CTA #59

We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church’s role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.”

TRC CTA #60

We call upon leaders of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and all other faiths, in collaboration with Indigenous spiritual leaders, Survivors, schools of theology, seminaries, and other religious training centres, to develop and teach curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, on the need to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right, the history and legacy of residential schools and the roles of the church parties in that system, the history and legacy of religious conflict in Aboriginal families and communities, and the responsibility that churches have to mitigate such conflicts and prevent spiritual violence.

TRC CTA #61

We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement, in collaboration with Survivors and representatives of Aboriginal organizations, to establish permanent funding to Aboriginal people for:

Community-controlled healing and reconciliation projects.

Community-controlled culture and language revitalization projects.

Community-controlled education and relationship- building projects.

Regional dialogues for Indigenous spiritual leaders and youth to discuss Indigenous spirituality, self- determination, and reconciliation.