



Dene National / Assembly of First Nations Office (NWT)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DENE NATIONAL CHIEF GEORGE MACKENZIE HONORS THE LEGACY OF THE HOLY SEE

[APRIL 22, 2025, YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH] – Dene National Chief George Mackenzie, who also serves as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Truth and Reconciliation portfolio holder, expresses deep respect and condolences on the passing of the Holy See. His Holiness Pope Francis has been a pivotal figure in the journey towards reconciliation and healing between the Catholic Church and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Chief Mackenzie acknowledges the Holy See's commitment to addressing the historical injustices faced by Indigenous communities, particularly the legacy of the Residential School system. "Pope Francis' efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities were important markers for the path towards healing and reconciliation," said Chief Mackenzie.

The Holy See's visit to Canada was a significant milestone in this journey. His desire to meet personally with Residential School Survivors and their families demonstrated a genuine commitment to understanding the profound impacts of the past. "His Holiness' visit was not just a gesture, but a step towards acknowledging the truth and working collaboratively to address the wrongs of the past," Chief Mackenzie added.

Pope Francis' leadership in promoting inclusivity within the Catholic Church has been commendable. His efforts to bring the faith into a modern era have been recognized and appreciated by many Indigenous communities. "The Pope's advocacy for the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures has been a beacon of hope for our communities. His deep commitment to the environment and climate issues was about respect for Creation," Chief Mackenzie stated.

The Dene Nation, along with other Indigenous groups, has been actively involved in the Truth and Reconciliation process. The Holy See's support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, including a papal apology in July 2022 on his return from Canada, was a crucial part of this process. "We respect Pope Francis' acknowledgment of the Church's role in the Residential School system and his commitment to making amends. He was the first to challenge the Church and bring in an era of change that included recognizing past wrongs to make space for change and opportunities for the Church to make amends. Above all, His Holiness loved the people and his commitment to the common person is the legacy that we will carry in his honour," Chief Mackenzie emphasized.

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As we reflect on the Holy See's legacy, we are reminded of the importance of continued dialogue and partnership. "The journey towards reconciliation is ongoing, and it requires the collective efforts of all parties involved," Chief Mackenzie concluded.

Looking forward, it is critical for Indigenous peoples in Canada that the next Pope makes these issues a priority. Although significant progress has been made, there remain urgent and pressing matters that need to be addressed. It is essential that the momentum towards reconciliation and healing continues, ensuring that the voices of Indigenous communities are heard and respected. This ongoing commitment will help to foster a future where past injustices are acknowledged and rectified, paving the way for a more inclusive and understanding society.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'George Mackenzie', is written over a horizontal line.

George Mackenzie
Dene National Chief
AFN Regional Chief for the Northwest Territories

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