

February 5, 2014

Honourable Teresa Wat
Minister of International Trade and Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific
Strategy and Multiculturalism
Room 342, Parliament Buildings, Victoria
PO Box 9063 Stn Pro Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Sent Via Email

Dear Minister Wat

First of all I wish to commend you and the BC government for initiating the community consultation regarding an apology for the 'head tax' and other historical wrongs done to Chinese Canadians in British Columbia.

I attended the consultation meeting in Vancouver to listen and support the Chinese-Canadian community in this process. However as I did not have an opportunity to share my thoughts publicly, I am happy to contribute to the consultation through this letter.

Our communities have faced discrimination from governments in the past, and it's important for us to talk about this and support each other. Just as the Chinese community faced discrimination under the Chinese Immigration Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Indian community was also discriminated against with the Continuous Journey Regulation. In 1914, the Komagata Maru ship challenged this law, but was turned away, leaving hundreds of Indians starving on the ship and devastating the small, local Indian community in Vancouver.

Even though the specific incidents of discrimination may be different, we can all share in a dialogue to overcome these past injustices and move towards creating a more multicultural Canada. Let's use this opportunity to make connections between our communities and other ones and work together.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident, when a ship with Indian passengers was denied entry to Canada. The ship remained docked in Burrard Inlet for two months as food and water resources diminished, but passengers were not allowed to disembark. The Canadian government actively delayed processing passengers until the ship was finally forced away by gunpoint by the Navy. This is a terrible part of our history and it's important to recognize and learn from this.

There have been apologies issued by the federal and provincial governments in the past. As we remember the Komagata Maru at 100 years, let's use this as an opportunity to open dialogue and learn from past wrongs.

The Province's apology to the Chinese Canadians must be meaningful and sincere. I believe it must address the physical, emotional, psychological and economic suffering many experienced as a result of the discriminatory wrongs done to the Chinese immigrants and their families.

Some people may think that an apology means the end of the conversation, but it can be the start of a larger conversation between many communities, where we can address racism, inequalities and past injustices through better education. This can be a path towards building stronger relationships with each other and to help build an inclusive British Columbia and Canada.

Sincerely



Barj S. Dhahan
Co-founder and Director