

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

Monday, January 20, 2014

7:00 – 9:00pm

Crystal Ballroom, Hilton Vancouver Metrotown

6083 McKay Ave, Burnaby BC



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

MC's: Queenie Choo and Ricky Li

Facilitator: Wei Shao

Attendance: Approximately 300 people

## Agenda

1. Queenie Choo and Ricky Li – Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Minister Teresa Wat – Opening Remarks
3. Ricky Li and Queenie Choo - Forum procedures
4. Wei Shao – Facilitation Process
5. Comments from community members
6. Queenie Choo and Ricky Li – Closing Remarks

## Community Members

### Paul Chen

#### Board Secretary, SUCCESS

Mr. Chen thanked the provincial government for initiating the process for an apology for historical wrongs. He made three points:

1. SUCCESS supports the positions that have been put forth by the Vancouver Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.
2. The government should structure a basic platform for immigration policies going forward with good checks and balances.
3. The government should also establish an education trust or funding for English as a Second Language education materials so that newcomers coming to Canada have a process to learn and understand what happened in our country.

### Paul Lee

#### PAC Unit 280

Mr. Lee stated that the topic was very personal to him as his grandfather had come to Canada and paid the Head Tax. Although it was a federal tax, BC was a strong supporter and therefore it is important that BC apologizes. Regarding the form of the apology, he agreed with the former speaker in that the most important thing is education and there should be funding for it. He believes there should be a text book because young Chinese immigrants coming to Canada today do not know how the Chinese suffered.

### Angela Brown

#### Vancouver Board of Education

Ms. Brown acknowledged that the Forum was in Coast Salish Territory. Ms. Brown is a grade 4/5 teacher who was born in East Vancouver and then moved to Burnaby. Her family had immigrated to Canada in 1970; experienced racism in Vancouver; and then more harshly in Burnaby. There is systemic cultural and historical racism which continues to impact Chinese and others today.

She appreciates that the government has opened this dialogue. A meaningful apology must contain wording that is meaningful and relevant, and have specific action that is educational. The apology must continue with legacy projects, such as changes to the k-12 curricula to create awareness of our history. The current curriculum is euro-centric. Chinese Canadian contributions need to be recognized or history will repeat itself.

### **Dr. Thomas Leung**

#### **Cultural Regeneration Research Society**

Dr. Leung stated that every culture has a system of making things better and hopes that all Canadians want to make things better too.

The Legislature should develop the apology, and the Lieutenant Governor should deliver the apology as she represents the Queen. In terms of wording, one word should be taken into consideration: repentance.

The government should ask for forgiveness and tolerance and the Chinese community should express forgiveness and forget. Dr. Leung stated that we have to learn to respect and appreciate other ethnicities and countries.

Everyone should learn about these historical events, not just students and they should be part of the formal education curriculum. There should also be symbolic compensation to victim families.

### **Allan Wong**

#### **Vancouver School Board Trustee**

#### **Member of BC School Trustee Association**

Mr. Wong appreciates the forums being held and the community being given the opportunity to speak prior to the official apology being developed. He represents the BC School Trustees Association's position on the issue. The following motion was supported by a majority of 60 school boards:

The BCSTA requests the Ministry of Education to review and incorporate the history of Chinese and Indigenous people in education materials to be developed with the Ministry, including the full extent of the history of the Chinese that entrenches the prejudices and the rich collective past and the long wait for the goal of reconciliation. There is a need to give students the opportunity to discuss this part of history. The current curriculum is lacking a full acknowledgment of the contributions of Chinese Canadians, including their history. It will enrich our understanding of our past and help with moving on in the future.

### **Roger Chan**

#### **Deputy Secretary General, Association of Chinese Cultural Promotion, Canada**

Mr. Chan fully supports these forums and recognizes that it takes courage for a government to speak of injustices that happened 100 years ago. The BC Government has taken the first step, facing the facts. There is no shame in admitting mistakes.

The government should set up monuments to commemorate the past, and the injustices should be written in text books so all Canadians know our history. Not just for Chinese people, but for all Canadians. Mr. Chan again expressed his thanks for being given the opportunity to speak.

**Angel Guo**

**Director, Association of Chinese Cultural Promotion Canada**

Ms Guo believes that everyone should pay attention to the original discrimination. The apology from the provincial government not only corrects mistakes for the past, but also has impact for the new generation of Chinese living in Canada. Canada is a country of multiculturalism, and even under the ideas of freedom, equality and democracy, racial discrimination still exists. Our students at schools suffer from bullying and there are anti-Chinese theories in the media. Our adults who are looking for employment, due to race, color skin etc, get unfair treatment. In the Canadian government and in some big corporations, management level is generally for white people.

Ms Guo called on all Chinese to unite together, to let their voices be heard and to guard their dignity. Ms. Guo mad the following suggestions to the provincial government:

1. Apologize sincerely. Acknowledge the contributions of the Chinese. Put past history into textbooks to let new immigrants, students, and young people have a better understanding toward history.
2. Raise the political status of Chinese. For example in voting, provide Chinese instruction on voting boxes and let more Chinese perform their voting right. And in leadership positions increase the chances of Chinese.
3. Create new legislation so that any discriminatory acts are abolished.

**Tingting Xu**

**Chinese Canadian Seniors Association – Seniors Society**

Mr. Xu expressed how happy he was to be able to speak. He is a senior who came to Canada 20 years ago. He says he is very happy and Canada is a beautiful county. He does not agree that seniors are discriminated against. He doesn't think anyone should be discriminated against. He is happy to see the government willing to help correct mistakes. He stated that we are all Canadians and if we love each other, the country will be very strong.

**Sandra Wilking**

**Burnaby Resident**

Ms. Wilking came to Canada 46 years ago. She wanted to acknowledge that she has done all the things she has done in this country, because of all the people from the past who suffered and fought for us all, like the war veterans.

Regarding the wording of the apology, it should include the theme of shared history, and should have the concept of reconciliation and contributions to Canada of Chinese community living within BC. Past history should not be repeated again.

She suggested the following to the government:

1. Establish a legacy community fund with a small secretariat with the purpose to create initiatives to inform young people (and all people in BC) about the historical wrongs in Canadian history. This initiative will bring people together.
2. Establish Asian Canadian chairs in universities – UBC, Victoria, SFU
3. Create a process to monitor federal and provincial legislation to ensure that legislation does not allow discrimination.
4. Communicate the outcomes of these consultations widely and strongly to all BC people, both Chinese and non-Chinese.

**Diana Lau**  
**Citizen**

Ms Lau expressed that she was very happy to have the opportunity to talk at the forum. She was sad to hear at the last forum how Chinese people were hurt. In high school she had learned how Chinese people helped build the railway and how many were killed. She was saddened by the fact that Chinese professionals were not allowed to be professionals. She also shared a story how she had wanted to apply for a job, but was told by her friend to go home. He said, “You are never allowed to work there...you are Chinese”. They won’t say that’s why you don’t get the job, but that’s why. She had heard about signs that said, “no dogs and no Chinese” allowed in places. She feels sorry for people who have suffered so much. People who have died for all Canadians.

She thanked Minister Wat for the opportunity to speak and hoped that Minister Wat would give the (Head Tax Families) people some money.

**Peter Lau**  
**Citizen**

Mr. Lau greeted everyone, said hello to Minister Wat, and expressed his happiness in being given the opportunity to talk about this issue.

First of all, he said there is an immigration organization saying that Chinese don’t need any compensation, which is ridiculous to him. There were early immigrants working as railway workers, and according to records, every one mile four died. During the last spike, there were no Chinese present for it.

Addressing Minister Wat, he said there are 100 discriminatory pieces of discriminatory legislation. He wanted to know in the Legislature, whether all these 100 legislations are repealed or can they be brought out again?

Mr. Lau expressed that the apology should be fair, reasonable, logical and up for discussion. He hopes that the government will try to reach out to more people to gather their input. He also hopes that Minister Wat can use her wisdom to settle this issue.

## Community Members (continued)

### Elwin Xie Citizen

If the target audience is new immigrants, the apology should be translated into Mandarin. If the target audience is Cantonese people from Hong Kong, it should be translated into Cantonese. However, if the target audience is people like his great grandfather who helped to build the railway, it should be translated into the county dialect. Mr. Xie held up a map which contained the regions of China from where people had come from, including the city of Toy Shan, Hoy Ping, En Ping, and Xin Hui.

Mr Xie continued, if the target audience is like his grandfather who paid the \$500 Head Tax, the apology should be translated into the county dialect. If the target audience is like his grandmother who came to Canada at the age of five, who paid the Head Tax according to immigration regulation, it should be translated into county dialect.

If the target audience is like his mother, who was separated from his father for over 12 years because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, it should be translated into the county language.

If the target audience is like my father who was born in 1920, learned Chinese at school, and graduated from the National Technical School of California, but because of the regulations, became a Chinese laundryman.

Many students don't know the history of the old Chinese. Mr. Xie believes that a museum for millworkers and laundrymen alike should be created, so that Head Tax Exclusion Act history can be found in Chinatown.

### Paul Wong Citizen

Mr. Wong was born and raised in Canada. He stated that there are a lot of words being thrown around the media like "Compensation" and "Apology". He believes the issue is all about education – that it needs to be about education. It's for the youth. He recalled that in school they talked about Aboriginal history, and learned about multiculturalism, and tolerance focus on youth education. I talk a lot about the foundation of Canada – Metis and Aboriginal people. Also in Social class, he studied WW1 and 2. They did not learn compassion or about good faith in each other. A multicultural fabric makes us. From Ghandi to Mother Theresa – it all starts with thoughts, an apology starts with words, words to speeches, speeches to action, actions become habits, habits become values, and values will help the youth.

Please add to the curriculum for the youth to come in the future years.



**Karin Lee**  
**Head Tax Families Society**

Ms. Lee is a filmmaker and teacher at UBC. She is a 4th generation British Columbian.

Her grandfather came to Barkerville in 1870. He had many of his rights taken away from him. They had no representatives. Ms. Lee asked Minister Watt to imagine how it would be if you didn't have any Chinese voting for you.

Ms. Lee's great grandfather had problems bringing his family over. There was insidious racism. Those who immigrated after 1947, enjoy privileges and should remember those who fought for them.

Ms. Lee's daughter wasn't able to join her at the forum because she was so upset by the things written in the paper. She is ashamed to be Chinese; Ms. Lee is ashamed as a parent; British Columbians should be ashamed.

The apology should go to all British Columbians, but the legacy should be decided by the head tax families. Reconciliation should be guided by them as well.

**Harley Wylie**  
**Head Tax Families Society**

Mr. Wylie acknowledged that the Forum was on Coast Salish territory and thanked Minister Wat for the opportunity to speak. Mr Wylie stated that the Head tax was wrong and provided several suggestions, including:

- A legacy policy should be created and overseen by head tax families.
- Apology should be given by the entire Legislature, including the Premier.
- Education is most important. Many people are unaware of what the Chinese people had to endure, and the privilege that people enjoy today because of what they went through.
- A statue or plaque should be on display in public.
- An endowment fund should be created.
- Should have a reconciliation dinner on the anniversary of the apology to recognize the work that has been done.

**Mary Chan**  
**Head Tax Families Society**

Ms. Chan acknowledged the Coast Salish people and their territory. Ms. Chan asked who the apology was for and who is trying to be reached? Should the apology be to the Head Tax Payers families? It would be meaningful if the government could travel back in time to apologize to the 80,000 people it directly affected. The other option is to apologize to the family's' descendants. It makes sense to start by apologizing to the elderly sons and daughters of those directly affected and then open up the dialogues with the families to make the apology meaningful. The government needs to invite input from impacted groups. The 9 million

dollars that went to the BC Government was an unjust tax and an historical wrong. It needs to be symbolically returned, not compensation of an unjust tax. The apology must be redemptive.

**Loo Meena Wong**  
**Citizen**

Ms. Wong stated that it is an important opportunity for the Chinese community to gather together, because the Chinese community has grown stronger. Their forefathers, the head tax payers, and the Chinese who fought in the military, even before being recognized as Canadians, need to be recognized. They helped make Canada for people like her, who came later. Today's Chinese Canadians enjoy fair treatment because of them and there is a Minister who is Chinese and Ms. Wong is happy that she can speak Chinese freely.

BC collected 9 million dollars from Head Tax payers which government should refund. The government needs to know that regardless of skin color, everyone should receive the same treatment. Ms. Wong thinks that people should ask the Minister for the Head Tax. She believes it is so important to the Chinese because only Chinese people paid it. The Chinese should fight for justice and fair treatment.

Ms. Wong hopes that the Minister will remember to include the head tax in the apology. The apology must include the head tax. It is a disappointment that it has not been mentioned formally even once. Ms. Wong closed by saying that she is present to build bridges, to create political participation, and to gain understanding.

**Kevin Lee**  
**Citizen**

Mr. Lee stated that legalized racial discrimination created tens of thousands of single families. Fathers became strangers and childhood memories did not include fathers reading stories, helping with sports, nor playing ball. A well-crafted apology without a symbolic monetary refund is empty. Head tax redress has been a long journey; many have died; and membership has diminished. An apology without any compensation or monetary compensation is empty. Many ideas or suggestions are not necessarily correct.

**Wong Sek Wun**  
**Head Tax Families Society**

Mr. Wun attended the forum to ask the audience whether the government has treated Head Tax Families fairly. The government collected \$500. His father died. Mr. Wun asked the audience if this was fair. He said it was not. He stated that there is no justice or fairness in the government. If there was, everyone would be treated the same.

Mr. Wun wants the government to give back what his father paid and that his family paid. He asked the audience if this was fair. He stated that the



## Community Members (continued)

government took his father's money, but only those who were still alive got compensated and that wasn't fair for the families of those whose head tax payer family member had passed away.

He says they are not asking for new money, just asking for their money back. An apology is necessary for the head tax and they would like to see three payments of the amount that was paid at that time. It is required for justice and to be fair.

### **Jung Chun Mow** **Citizen**

Ms. Mow came to Canada 30 years ago and went to the Chinese Benevolent Association and asked them about federal compensation for Head Tax, but she has had no response. The government said they had paid out all compensations; that only the living or spouses could collect and not their children. She was very disappointed and feels the government should treat everyone the same and compensate her.

### **Douglas Dang** **Citizen**

Mr. Dang is a Canadian born Chinese. His grandfather paid head tax, and his late grandfather was able to receive the money. He believes in order for the apology to be sincere, it should come with some kind of compensation. The government should do the right thing and put money where their mouth is. Not a lot of money. Just a show of sincerity. \$500 of head tax money from the past is worth over \$2,000 now. Mr. Dang feels that \$13, 333 is a symbolic gesture to show sincerity.

### **Howe Lee** **Chinese Canadian Military Museum**

Mr. Lee feels that the regarding the Head Tax apology issue, the federal and provincial governments have unfair documents. The government owes an apology to descendants and should set up an education fund. He thinks there should be some classes developed to talk about the past contribution of Chinese and put historical content in textbooks for Grade 7 and 8 students.

Mr. Lee stated that Canada is a democratic country. He reminded the audience that the Federal government had already given an apology and compensation.

Mr. Lee said the provincial government can be the lead and the BC government is a fair government.

**Faye Leung**

**Faye Leung Health and Education Foundation**

Ms. Leung was thankful that she had attended the forums on Jan 12th in Vancouver. A meaningful apology and a legacy is a good thing. She suggested that a meaningful apology should include a thank you from BC for suffering to be recorded for posterity perpetually. She said that she spoke for pioneers. She has collected the stories from 1881 to 2013 in pictures, documents and letters that can be published with the community's help for the school system to understand the heart and soul of that time. She believes these stories would provide aspiration for the youth and knowledge about Canada's immigrants. They were hard workers and had a lot of integrity. The Chinese are good citizens who have suffered so much and did not deserve to suffer.

**Sid Wong**

**Citizen**

Mr. Wong is a member of the Chinese Head Tax Families Society, a resident of Canada for 55 years, and a descendant of two head tax payers - a grandfather and a great grandfather.

Mr. Wong feels the government should make symbolic and meaningful compensation for the head tax which was collected by the federal government. Without financial compensation, the apology is not meaningful, especially considering that the money would be worth 1.2 billion dollars today. Mr. Wong reiterated that the money should be returned to the Head Tax Families today.

**Seu Chun Suen**

**Citizen**

Mr. Suen noted that in Burnaby, many people speak Mandarin, so he spoke in Mandarin as well. He wondered if people didn't know about Head Tax history and that the Canada of today is very different than that of the past. His father paid \$500 for the Head Tax and it was worth 2 houses back then. He commented that if you hadn't paid it, you couldn't know how it felt. His father worked very hard to raise the \$500 and he worked just as hard after he moved here. He had heard that many people died on every mile of track. He hopes that there will be tolerance among all Canadians and then society will have justice and fairness and be better for future growth.

Mr. Suen feels that he was not invited to the forums. He wrote letters to the Premier and to Ministers regarding this issue, but has never had a response. He closed by stating that the government collected 9 million dollars and he wants to get back what his family had paid.

## Community Members (continued)

### Foon Chang Citizen

Ms. Chang's family came to Canada in 1918 and they paid the Head Tax. Three of her family members paid the Head Tax and all of them have passed away. As their descendent, she wants to have the money they paid returned to her. The first one paid \$50; the second one paid \$100; and the third paid \$500. Later their family members couldn't come due to the Exclusion Act. Her husband had never seen his dad until he came to Canada. Father and son were reconciled with a picture of each other in their hand to identify each other. That's how they met.

There were many pioneers who came to BC Canada from En Ping, Zhong Shan, Hoy Ping, Toy Shan, Poon Yue, Xin Hui and they all paid the Head Tax. Ms. Chang commented that some people have said she and others like her are trying to take taxpayers money. But her family members who came over here and paid the Head Tax paid taxes for many years.

She also wondered why an article published in Min Pao about this issue was later taken out.

And in conclusion, Ms. Chang asked for the Ministers help with another issue which is for the seniors to get bus passes. Now the policy depends on their income, but if they are over a bit, they are not eligible to buy the 5 dollar bus pass. She hopes that the Minister will change this to allow all seniors to get the \$5 dollar discount.

### Henry Mark Citizen

Mr. Mark hopes that the government will listen to the community regarding this issue, or it will keep dragging on. He feels that Head Tax survivors suffered a lot. He is one of those survivors. Due to the Chinese Exclusion act, Mr. Mark's father spent most of his life in Canada without family. He visited only once when he was able to save enough money to go back and visit. Mr. Mark's mother had to raise 5 children by herself during the Second World War. She did not get any support from her husband. She and her children suffered greatly. After the war, Chinese Canadians were given citizenship and so his father was able to sponsor his mother and 3 younger children to come to Canada.

It is important to address this issue once and for all. He suggests one compensation for one certificate.

### Lawrence Chan Citizen

Mr. Chan stated that as the room was full of mainly Chinese people, in the spirit of democracy, he chose to speak in Chinese. He believed that to be very important in a democratic country, though he stressed that the non-Chinese presence at the forum was very important. From Mr. Chan's perspective, he had the choice of immigrating to Canada or the United

## Community Members (continued)

States but he chose Canada because he had felt that Canada was a more tolerant and peaceful country.

He stated that Canada has many good things. Canadians like to hear history and historical stories. Recently there are many programs on TV about this topic, such as the origins of people and railway history. Unfortunately, half of the history contains much discriminatory legislation towards the Chinese. This is an unhealed wound in history. There was much unfair treatment. He thinks the apology may be too late. Mr. Chan doesn't think that people are only attending for monetary compensation but to ensure that this dark part of Canada's history is not forgotten.

### **Rudy Chiang** Citizen

Ms. Chiang referred to the year 1831, and stated that out of 118 fishermen, 76 were Chinese, 64%. In 1881, it was 65%. There is a list of wrongful legislation that shows how hardworking the Chinese were. Despite how much they were discriminated against, they persevered. Discrimination helped to preserve the legacy of Chinese pioneers --can find details because of the head tax records.

Ms. Chiang asked that of the Chinese workers who helped to build BC, how many do you think would have been able to pay a \$10 head tax when a day's wages were paid in pennies. She looks at this as a sign of how hard the Chinese immigrants worked that they were able to save the money and pay the Head Tax.

As the great grandchild of one of these pioneers, Ms. Chiang does not seek verbal token apologies. She wants to see the missing chapter of this issue written in our schools' history textbooks for the youth because the only history that she learned about was colonial history.

### **Keith Chan** Citizen

Mr. Chan would like to pay his respects to the Head Tax families. For 45 years in Canada he has sensed the non-verbal signs of discrimination. There are many levels of discrimination, not just voiced or written, but attitude as well. From history's perspective, the apology is too late. David Lam was Lieutenant Governor 25 years ago, and 8 years ago Prime Minister Harper apologized, so Mr. Chan wondered if the current discussions regarding a formal apology is just for public relations. There are 60,000 Chinese living in Burnaby.

Mr. Chan thinks the apology should be sincere, not just for public relations or a form of verbal art because it's easy for politicians if it's verbal art because some of them are very good at talking.

He believes that head tax families should be considered because 9 million dollars was collected. It was a lot back then, though not too much now.

## Community Members (continued)

### **Anita Chubb-Kennedy** **First Nations**

Ms. Chubb-Kennedy supports the Chinese community in seeking an apology. She is certain other First Nations will as well. From Manitoba across the country, the First Nations had nothing to do or say in what happened to the Chinese.

She feels it has taken far too long for an apology, and she doesn't understand why consultations have to happen. She laments what is happening in her country. It's oppression - another form of discrimination. The Premier and other leaders should apologize to the Chinese community.

The government should work at it and correct it through education.

### **Alnoor Gova** **Inter-Community Coalition**

Mr. Gova acknowledged that the forum was held on Coast Salish territory. He spoke on behalf of the Inter-Community Coalition which recently passed several items during an executive meeting. First and foremost they would like to ask the Minister to consult directly with the Head Tax Families when forming the apology. Mr. Gova listed a dozen or so supporting communities as part of the coalition, and stated that they would be submitting a letter to the BC government.

### **MC closing**