

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

Sunday, November 17, 2013

3:00 – 5:00pm

Chinese Public School, 636 Fisgard, Victoria, BC



Host: Thomas Chan, President, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association

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

Attendance: 58 people

Agenda

1. Thomas Chan – Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Minister Teresa Wat – Opening Remarks
3. Dean Sekyer – Consultation Questions and Process
4. Comments from community members
5. Thomas Chan – Closing Remarks
6. Minister Teresa Wat – Closing Remarks and Thank You

Thomas Chan Opening Remarks

- Everyone was welcomed and attendees were thanked for attending the first forum in Victoria's Chinatown, Canada's oldest Chinese community.
- Mr. Chan introduced himself as the President of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), which is an umbrella organization for 29 Canadian Chinese associations in Victoria.
- Minister Wat contacting the Victoria CCBA in regard to this forum and its intention, it is clear that the Government is sincere and is seeking a real and open discussion – to know and to listen.
- On behalf of the CCBA, Mr. Chan thanked Minister Wat for coming to Victoria and indicated that the Minister would address the community.

Minister Teresa Wat Opening Remarks

- Minister Wat thanked Mr. Chan for his kind introduction; acknowledged the hard work of the CCBA in hosting the event; expressed that she personally felt honoured and privileged to be in attendance; and communicated her appreciation that those in attendance took their Sunday afternoon to attend.
- As Victoria's Chinatown is the oldest in Canada and second oldest in North America, our shared history begins in Victoria and it is an appropriate starting place.
- Victoria's Chinese community has made rich and vibrant contributions to BC and Canada.
- We have shared experiences and memories and we can engage with respect in taking this step towards a formal apology.

Dean Sekyer Executive Director Ministry of International Trade Questions & Process

- Mr. Dean Sekyer expressed his gratitude for the honour of attending the first forum in Victoria and arranging for the administration of the process on behalf of the Ministry of International Trade and the Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism on this project of historical importance.
- The process allows British Columbians to tell their story and to direct the Government in a bipartisan apology and to provide comments to the Minister regard to: The wording of an appropriate and respectful apology; The delivery of an apology; and, Ideas or comments on any educational legacy projects that would be appropriate.
- This included how to make submissions or to attend in person, as Victoria's forum is to be the first of several across the province that will be announced within the next two weeks.

Victor Wong

WWII veteran and the President of the Chinese Canadian Veteran's Association)

- Mr. Wong discussed that when he was born he was not recognized as a Canadian citizen, something Chinese Canadian's did not achieve until they returned from the War.
- Discrimination was wide spread, were Chinese Canadian's could not own property and were not allowed to participate in the professions.
- When Chinese Canadian soldiers came back from the war their contribution was known, and they lobbied for the repeal of the Exclusion Act and other discriminatory legislation. Veterans got the vote for their people.
- Times changed. David Lam became Lieutenant Governor. Chinese Canadian's can participate in the professions.
- Life became much better. The community wants an apology, no money, because it has everything now.
- Mr. Wong presented to Minister Wat a certificate he received from a Canadian Prime Minister.

Gordon Quan

WWII Veteran

- Mr. Quan identified himself as being with the Veteran's Association for a long time and presented documentation to Minister Wat.
- Mr. Wong's previous presentation was cited by Mr. Quan as the historical background the forum needed to know.
- First, Chinese Canadian veterans fought overseas for Canada and then they fought for their community to be recognized as participating citizens within Canada.

Councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe

- Victoria City Councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe indicated that the first consultation was a good start, recognized the veterans, and expressed her appreciation for all the generations before us who suffered by paying the Head Tax and other discrimination.
- Speaking for her family in making suggestions, the apology is to be done sincerely.
- It is not about financial compensation.
- The words are less important than how the apology is said. The apology should be delivered from the Premier with the support of the Ministers, perhaps in Chinatown.
- Education of young people going forward is also important for them to remember the past and to work together for a better future.

Community Members (continued)

Dr. David Chenyan Lai

Advisor to CCBA

- Clarity is required and the Province is requested not to apologize for the federal head tax which was ultimately a federal responsibility and an apology has already been offered by that government.
- The Province is suggested to apologize only for discrimination for which it is responsible for.
- No apology by the Province should be made for local governments in British Columbia for their discriminatory practices historically. Local governments may elect to apologize but the Provincial government should not apologize for them or on their behalf.
- It was suggested to Minister Wat that the apology should be made by the Premier, the recognized provincial leader of the provincial government.
- In regard to legacy, a fund is suggested to promote Chinese history in British Columbia and to recognize the contribution made to British Columbia's multicultural heritage.

Gilbert Cheung

CCBA Vice-President

- Mr. Cheung emphasized the need for an apology to address past wrongs, his agreement with Dr. Lai.
- He expressed the distinction he and other speakers are making between no financial compensation to individuals which is not necessarily the same as not providing financial resources for legacy efforts.
- Suggestions include infrastructure improvements which demonstrate that the Government is sincere in its apology.

Sinclair Mah

Chair of Chinese Care Centre Foundation

- In regard to legacy projects, the Chinese Care Centre Foundation has 31 beds for frail elderly people in the community.
- Support is required from the VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority), the Province and the federal government to open new beds.

Dr. Tzu-I Ching

Historian from BC Museum

- Dr. Tzu-I Ching is a Trans-Canadian Studies Historian.
- In regard to legacy, educational resources would be an important legacy.
- Videos about Chinese culture in Canada made in Mandarin for K-12 curriculum in BC and for people in China might be helpful.
- The government can help in education. While there are many educational resources in the BC museum, some need special tools to unlock or read.
- Victoria's Chinatown could be further acknowledged as the oldest surviving Chinatown in Canada.

Community Members (continued)

Joseph Leung

Past President of CCBA and member of 3 other Organizations

- Mr. Leung is the past President of the CCBA and a current member of the Yu San Association, Chung Hou Association and San Yee association.
- Mr. Leung spoke to his membership and it is agreed that there should not be financial compensation – the community doesn't want any monetary compensation.
- They want an open, direct sincere apology that keeps to the facts about the unfairness legislated against Chinese people in BC.
- Mr. Leung reports that the provincial apology should come from the Premier.

Andrew Weaver

MLA

- Believes it is important for politicians to listen.
- Pleased that the government is moving forward with an apology.
- Offered thanks for the opportunity to attend.

Winnie Lee

Inter-cultural Association (ICA) of Greater Victoria

- Ms. Lee feels that "racism" should be referenced directly in an apology made by the Premier.
- The apology could take place in several venues or at several events, where impacted families or veterans could attend.
- The apology does not need to be exclusive to the Legislature.
- In regard to legacy, Ms. Lee provided suggestions, speaking of the need for school curriculum material, adult education, and new immigrant awareness so that the community's history is understood.

Thomas Chan Closing Remarks

- Mr. Chan provided an over-all summary for the CCBA membership and some of the suggestions heard at the forum.
- There should be no monetary compensation for individuals for the head tax or other historical discrimination.
- The apology should be made by the Premier for the Province's discriminatory legislation and practices against the Chinese community in British Columbia.
- The Province should undertake educational legacy projects and should consider working in partnership with other levels of government and the community to provide those educational legacies.

Minister Teresa Wat Closing Remarks

- Minister Wat thanked everyone for their attendance and confirmed that all comments heard will be considered along with the comments from the other consultation sessions as part of the official consultation record.