

Main points presented at the Richmond Consultation Forum

by Thekla Lit, President of BC ALPHA (Association for Learning & Preserving the History of WWII in Asia)

1. Today's consultation is about the apology to British Columbia's Chinese community who were directly and indirectly impacted by historical wrongs and discriminatory legislation. Unfortunately, an apology alone cannot achieve reconciliation. An apology alone cannot nurture acceptance, understanding and mutual respect.
2. Without the understanding, blessing and endorsement from the general public, the apology as proposed by the provincial government will cause further harm instead of achieving reconciliation between Chinese & Caucasian communities. This is already evident in the backlash we have witnessed from the non-Chinese public. The Chinese community is being criticized as overly aggressive, overly demanding and money-grabbing, as you can read from the comments made by a significant part of the general public in response to the non-Chinese media reports on the proposed apology.
3. In the work of our organization, BC ALPHA (Association for Learning & Preserving the History of WWII in Asia), we learn a lot about how Germany & Japan have dealt with crimes against humanity committed during WWII with very different approaches that have yielded very different results. Germany has demonstrated its sincerity in facing squarely their dark chapter of history and continues to take due actions to reconcile that past. Reconciliation between Germany and its war victims has largely been achieved, and Germany has gained the respect from the world community. Japan, on the other hand, refuses to squarely acknowledge the responsibility of its aggression and crimes against humanity committed during the War. Some Japanese officials did offer apology statements on certain occasions, but such acts were considered to lack sincerity because these apologies were often later contradicted by statements or actions of prominent Japanese authorities. Thus, victims of Japanese atrocities during WWII strongly feel that justice and reconciliation have not been achieved. Even worse, younger generations in Japan have little or no understanding of such demands from the victims because unlike Germany, education about the Asian Holocaust has not been on the agenda of the Japanese government.
4. To redress the historical wrongs against the Chinese, the BC government should adopt the approach used by the German government, i.e. to take leadership to enter into a proper and sincere process for achieving genuine and meaningful reconciliation, the likes of which must include:
 - first researching into and then acknowledging the full picture of the historical wrongs inflicted on the Chinese community;

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- educating both sides about such historical facts to make this chapter of history a shared history and collective memory of all British Columbians, if not all Canadians;
 - taking redemptive actions as agreed by both sides after proper and thorough consultation, the objective of which is to learn valuable lessons from this dark chapter of history so as to prevent repeating the history. Another objective is to relieve all British Columbians from this historical burden. Proper redemptive actions will include but not limited to:-
 - i. ongoing public and school education about this history
 - ii. erecting monuments and museums to remember those who suffered and to honor the contributions of the Chinese community in BC and in Canada
 - iii. preserving significant historical sites to show respect for history and to facilitate tangible learning by younger generations
 - iv. appropriate apology endorsed by the general public and accepted by the Chinese community
 - v. possible honorable and symbolic compensation and/or community funds to stakeholders
5. Thirteen year ago, when Minister Wat was working as media and community liaison at the BC Premier office, she, out of her sense of justice, advised the then Premier to include the Asian Holocaust education in the BC school curriculum, which was later actualized. I understand that Minister Wat is now taking up this apology project under the direction of Premier Clarke. However, I would like to urge Minister Wat to once again exercise her sense of justice by advising the Premier to achieve genuine and meaningful reconciliation between the Chinese and Caucasian communities through a proper and sincere process as presented above. Then, we can all move forward into a better future for BC.

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