

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

May 8, 2024

First Reconciliation Action Plan seeks to build new relationship with Indigenous Peoples

VICTORIA – The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has released its first Reconciliation Action Plan.

The plan recognizes the need to address historical injustices by acknowledging the past and working to build new relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on respect and understanding — and outlines the commitments and actions the legislative assembly will undertake to contribute toward reconciliation.

“As Speaker, it’s my priority to ensure every person who visits the Parliament Buildings feels they are welcome, and that they belong here. Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is an essential part of this work,” said Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the legislative assembly. “It has been my honour to begin building a new relationship with First Nations leaders, both in Victoria and throughout the province — and to acknowledge that true reconciliation is not achieved through a single act, but rather through ongoing commitment and concerted effort.”

The legislative assembly’s first Reconciliation Action Plan includes five commitments and seven initial actions, shaped by input received directly from First Nations leaders through significant engagement and outreach. It has been approved by the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, which oversees the administration and operations of the legislative assembly.

In May 2023, the Speaker established the Speaker’s Indigenous Reconciliation Advisory Committee (SIRAC) to receive guidance directly from Indigenous leaders on how the legislative assembly could most meaningfully engage with Indigenous Peoples and advance reconciliation. In its first year, the committee included four Indigenous leaders, reflecting a diversity of views and experiences: Taylor Baker, executive councillor for Tsawwassen First Nation; Howard Grant, councillor for Musqueam Indian Band; Chief David Jimmie, Squiala First Nation; and Chief Willie Sellars, Williams Lake First Nation.

SIRAC members Taylor Baker and Howard Grant joined Chouhan to release the Reconciliation Action Plan at an event held at the Parliament Buildings. Other guests included representatives from the First Nations Leadership Council and Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation, as well as MLAs.

“I am incredibly pleased to see the legislative assembly commit to taking bold action and building a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples across British Columbia through tabling the Reconciliation Action Plan,” said SIRAC member Taylor Baker. “I commend the Speaker for taking the time to visit First Nations communities across the province to learn about their histories and perspectives, and then apply those learnings to develop a coherent plan of action that will lead to more inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples in and around the legislative assembly.”

To better understand the historical impacts caused to First Nations through the actions of the legislative assembly, released alongside the Reconciliation Action Plan is a research publication titled *First Nations and the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia: A Record of Historical*

Actions, Decisions and Statements in Legislative Proceedings, 1872-1972. The research contains 874 records of decisions and debates related to First Nations during the first 100 years of the legislative assembly.

“The legislative assembly of British Columbia is intended to be the people’s house and for a long time the people’s house conveyed a truth that did not acknowledge Indigenous Peoples,” said SIRAC member Howard Grant. “The legislative assembly’s Reconciliation Action Plan acknowledges the truth of what Indigenous Peoples have endured and its tabling signifies the first brick to rebuild the collective people’s house.”

The Reconciliation Action Plan is the first document of its kind released by a Canadian parliamentary institution. Some of the actions the legislative assembly commits to in the plan include:

- issuing an official apology to First Nations in B.C.;
- incorporating Indigenous customs and cultures into the rules, practices and symbols of the legislative assembly; and
- developing a plan for a memorial garden to commemorate the tragic legacy of Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia and across Canada.

The legislative assembly will continue to engage and collaborate with Indigenous Peoples and take specific actions to implement each of the plan’s commitments. The clerk of the legislative assembly will be mandated to implement the plan, ensuring all MLAs and staff have opportunities to support and participate in reconciliation activities and commitments. The Speaker of the legislative assembly will oversee implementation of the current and future actions included in the Reconciliation Action Plan with guidance from the Speaker’s Indigenous Reconciliation Advisory Committee.

Learn More:

Read the Legislative Assembly of BC Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2028:

<https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Documents/reconciliation-action-plan.pdf>

Read First Nations and the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia: A Record of Historical Actions, Decisions and Statements in Legislative Proceedings, 1872-1972:

<https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Documents/first-nations-historical-record.pdf>

A backgrounder with quotations follows.

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BACKGROUND

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What people are saying about the Legislative Assembly's first Reconciliation Action Plan

Chief David Jimmie, SIRAC member (Squiala First Nation) –

“Issuing an apology to First Nations across B.C. for the harms the legislative assembly of British Columbia enabled to become law is an important action listed in the legislative assembly’s Reconciliation Action Plan. To move forward in a good way, acknowledging the truth of what happened to First Nations across the province followed by firm commitments to work in collaboration with First Nations is the bold action required to achieve reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.”

Chief Willie Sellars, SIRAC member (Williams Lake First Nation) –

“The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia’s Reconciliation Action Plan signifies the institution’s commitment to reflect the British Columbia of today, not the British Columbia of 1871. The actions outlined in this plan are aimed at modernizing age-old British traditions and amplifying Indigenous contributions that have strengthened this province throughout history. I look forward to the good work that will follow as the legislative assembly of British Columbia embarks on its next chapter of working towards meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president, Union of BC Indian Chiefs –

“We applaud the Speaker for his proactive approach in spearheading the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan for the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, an institution deeply intertwined with colonial legacies. Throughout history, the relationship between First Nations and the legislative assembly has been marked by racism, denial, and subsequent discord. We look forward to the implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan by all members of the legislative assembly in full alignment with the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and grounded in mutual respect, collaboration, and partnership.”

Cheryl Casimer, political executive, First Nations Summit –

“We commend the Speaker for his initiative and undertaking the work necessary to establish a Reconciliation Action Plan for the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, which has always at its core represented institutionalized colonialism. First Nations’ relationship with the legislative assembly, much like their relationship with the provincial government, has historically been mired in racism, denial and – therefore – conflict and adversity. The Reconciliation Action Plan represents another much-needed step to turn the page in our collective history towards a new era and path for building a respectful relationship built on recognition, respect, co-operation, and partnership.”

Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations –

“With the passing of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act by the legislative

assembly of British Columbia, we have embarked on a journey to honour and protect First Nations' human rights. The dedicated leadership and efforts of the Speaker in developing and unveiling the Reconciliation Action Plan, with the support of the Speaker's Indigenous Reconciliation Advisory Committee (SIRAC), signify a vital step in confronting the lasting legacies of colonialism and systemic racism. By actively engaging with and understanding First Nations viewpoints, we are taking decisive steps toward real change on the continuous path to reconciliation for the benefit of future generations."

Angela White, executive director, Indian Residential School Survivors Society –

"I am honoured to contribute to the dialogue surrounding the Legislative Assembly's Reconciliation Action Plan and its pivotal legacy project. Throughout this journey, collaborations and local protocols were respected and followed meticulously, ensuring the profound voices of former students of Indian Residential Schools were heard and honoured. The deep significance of the land in our collective healing from colonial history cannot be overstated, and I am proud that this garden will serve as a poignant reflection of this truth. It is imperative that all embrace the importance of incorporating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations into our collective conscience, and this project is a tangible step towards that noble goal."

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