

**EXPRESSIONS OF RECONCILIATION
Reconciliation Week Vancouver
September 18, 2013
Professor Stephen J. Toope
President and Vice-Chancellor
The University of British Columbia**

Good afternoon.

For the privilege of delivering this message to you today, I offer my gratitude to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; to each individual involved in organizing the events here in Vancouver; to Chief Bobby Joseph; to our hosts, the people of the Coast Salish territories; and to the Musqueam and Okanagan peoples on whose traditional lands UBC sits. It is an honour to be with you all.

We still call them schools. The “Indian Residential *Schools*.” As head of the largest school in British Columbia, I am aware that to use that same word—school—to refer to both those institutions and my own makes me distinctly uncomfortable. My first instinct is to want to distance UBC and in fact all the educational institutions of today from the residential schools, to draw a line between us, or to call the

residential schools something else, to redefine 'school' ... *anything*, so that I can say, *We are not what they were*.

But the truth is that if there is a line between us, that line does not divide us; it connects us. There is what the residential school system did; and then there is what British Columbia's school system failed to do, by keeping silent, for years, about what happened. There has been a critical gap in the education of British Columbians, an absence of information and, as a result, an absence of awareness and an absence of restorative action.

We have begun at last to break that silence. At every level, our school system is beginning to teach Canada's residential school history as well as the resulting issues that affect Aboriginal peoples still, generations later.

Post-secondary institutions must play the particular role of furthering a deeper understanding through research and an advanced level of intercultural discourse. Through ongoing education, Canadians must come to a shared understanding of the circumstances that have

shaped Aboriginal experience so that we may all begin to know and to value one another.

UBC's own preparations for this week began in earnest over two years ago, and our commitment has grown in the time since. Today, classes are suspended so that students, staff, and faculty may attend these events and I am pleased to see many from the UBC community here today. Teaching faculty have been encouraged to make these issues part of the conversation in their classrooms, no matter what subject they teach.

And finally, we have begun to raise money to build a UBC Centre for the Study of Indian Residential Schools. If we are successful, the Centre will occupy a place in the physical heart of our Vancouver campus, very near the main library, the locus of memory and record-keeping. Thousands will see it every day, and for students, researchers, and visitors alike, it will be a destination place. It will be a point of access to records and a repository for new recollections of survivors. It will also support the development of educational

materials, physical and digital, for use in universities, the K-12 school system, public venues, and communities.

On behalf of the University of British Columbia, I leave with you this photograph of the dedication of a new Musqueam welcome figure at our new law school building as a symbol of our commitment to reconciliation.

Thank you.