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Recommendations for Redressing Historical Wrongs Against Japanese Canadians in BC (excerpt)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JAPANESE CANADIANS COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS REPORT

Submitted to the BC government on 14 November 2019

For the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei ...

*especially those who fell through the cracks,
those whose life stories will rarely or never be told,
those whose bodies, minds, and spirits never recovered from the poison
inflicted by hatred and racist political agendas
those who died while interned or in the east
before returning to their homes on the west coast,
and those who never heard the words of a government apology ...
and for the generations who follow ...*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In seeking redress for its communities, the NAJC respectfully acknowledges the ongoing struggle of Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada.

MESSAGE FROM NAJC PRESIDENT

I am honoured to submit *Redressing Historical Wrongs Against Japanese Canadians in BC*, Community Consultations Report on behalf of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) for consideration by the Government of British Columbia. This report outlines the results of the NAJC's consultations with the Japanese Canadian community to determine a meaningful follow-up to the British

Columbia Government's Motion of Apology for Japanese Canadian Internment During the Second World War, passed by the British Columbia Legislative Assembly in 2012.

During the community consultations, we heard from members of our community who were directly affected by discrimination and internment. Some shared their stories, including painful family separations, denial of education, and racism. BC Redress is intensely personal for the Japanese Canadian community. Many Japanese Canadian families were long-time settlers in BC, like my family who came from Japan in the 1800s, and most of their descendants would still be living in BC if not for the aggressive actions of BC politicians before, during, and after the Second World War.

Like many other *Yonsei*, I did not know the history of our community or about internment. As a child, I remember going to the PNE (Pacific National Exhibition) in Hastings Park. I also remember my mother's reluctance to go to the petting zoo in the livestock barns. As an adult, I found out that her family, along with many others, was forcibly uprooted from their home on Vancouver Island with little notice and only a few suitcases. My mother, a little girl at the time, was heartbroken. From her family's clean, well-kept home, she ended up in the stench of the livestock barns in Hastings Park in Vancouver, then to live in a tent at the Popoff internment site in the interior of BC.

My mother's story is just one of many. We want to use our stories to educate and collaborate to eliminate racism. This work is timely as Canadian society currently faces rising challenges from populist and anti-immigrant movements. We strive for justice in the present and the future, as much as honouring our past and paying respect to our *Issei*, *Nisei*, and *Sansei*.

Given the role previous BC Governments played in the internment and dispossession of Japanese Canadians, we appreciate the current BC Government taking the first step to support these community consultations. We look forward to working with the BC Government on the next steps for meaningful measures to redress the violation of rights and financial and other losses for 22,000 Japanese Canadians, and to address the intergenerational impacts of government actions. By helping to ensure a degree of justice for Japanese Canadians, the BC government can help safeguard against any such future injustices.

Lorene Oikawa
President, National Association of Japanese Canadians

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With support from the British Columbia (BC) Government, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) coordinated an extensive consultation process consisting of community meetings in nine locations in BC, virtual community consultations, an online survey, and written submissions from individuals and organizations in the Japanese Canadian community. The consultations were conducted between April and September 2019. All participants were asked to respond to the following question: *What should the Government of BC do to redress its history of racial discrimination and unjust actions that devastated the Japanese Canadian community?*

The following five themes emerged from the community consultations, ranked in order of importance:

1. Enhance Public School Education in British Columbia.

Japanese Canadian history should be embedded in the mandatory core public elementary and high school curricula and be available online. Professional development opportunities should be available for teachers at all grade levels on the Japanese Canadian experience. Academic grants should be established for research and the development of teaching tools and a digital library on Japanese Canadian history.

2. Take Concrete Steps to Combat Racism and

Discrimination. We encourage the BC Government to create an independent body to review and assess the BC Government's existing anti-racism strategy in consultation with affected communities and service providers. The independent body should also develop and coordinate BC-based anti-racism programs, services, and education resources, as well as developing policies to counter growing incidents of hate-motivated actions and speech.

3. Raise Public Awareness through Memorialization.

Funding should be provided to sustain the maintenance and operations of new and existing museums (especially the Nikkei National Museum), historic sites, and monuments, and to reclaim historic community spaces. To further reinforce memorialization, an official commemorative day should be established to celebrate the franchise and free movement granted to Japanese Canadians in 1949,

accompanied by the construction of a physical memorial.

4. **Create a Japanese Canadian Community Legacy Fund.** Establish a fund administered by the Japanese Canadian community to support community development programs, activities, and needs such as: seniors' care and housing, community wellness and healing programs, community gathering programs to rebuild fragile communities, scholarships for post-secondary students of Japanese Canadian descent, and anti-hate initiatives.

5. **Deliver a Formal Apology Acknowledging the BC Government's Role.** We seek a formal acknowledgement of the wrongs committed by former BC Governments that led to the injustices faced by Japanese Canadians who suffered in mind, body, and spirit, and a sincere apology to those surviving Japanese Canadians directly affected by the injustices of incarceration, forced displacement, dispossession, and exile. The apology should be delivered by the BC Premier in the Provincial Legislature and the wording developed in consultation with the Japanese Canadian community.

Source: http://najc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NAJC_BC_Redress_report_only20191031.1421.pdf.