

Note to editors: This statement is issued on behalf of the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee and its members. The Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee is not expressing views on behalf of the City of Vancouver.

Sent on behalf of the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee
News release
July 7, 2020

City of Vancouver's Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee Calls for Meaningful Action on Anti-Racism and Reconciliation by Mayor, Council and Civic Departments

The City of Vancouver's Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee issued a call today to Mayor Stewart, City Council and civic departments to respond decisively and meaningfully to rising levels of racism within the city, and to renew its commitments to reconciliation efforts at the municipal level.

In 2014 city council declared Vancouver as a City of Reconciliation, and released an accompanying City of Reconciliation framework. The formation of the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee provided a platform to bring together municipal government and urban Indigenous leaders, who serve upon the committee in the spirit of reconciliation. Unfortunately, efforts to foster and deepen relationships through this space have come to a halt, with anti-Indigenous racism on the rise and continued levels of systemic racism being experienced across municipal institutions.

Racism and colonialism are deeply rooted and systemic issues. The committee stands in solidarity with Black and racialized communities as we collectively grieve senseless losses amidst continued colonial violence across Turtle Island. Through the upheavals of COVID-19 and the growing anti-racist movement, there is renewed energy and urgency around calls to confront discriminatory policies, colonial mindsets and unchecked privileges that continue to disproportionately impact underserved communities.

Amidst this critical time and these calls for action, the committee is seeing mounting evidence of a growing discrepancy between the stated values and vision of the city as a City of Reconciliation and the actions of its institutions. These include:

- The arrest of Maxwell Johnson and his granddaughter at the Burrard St Bank of Montreal in December, for which the Vancouver Police Department have not taken responsibility for their actions nor apologized.
- The forcible displacement of individuals living in Oppenheimer Park and CRAB Park during a pandemic.

- The decision of the Vancouver School Board trustees to allow the School Liaison Officer program to continue in Vancouver schools, without any input from Black or Indigenous leaders.
- The deferral of calls to the VSB to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities around its forthcoming Land and Asset Strategy.
- The continuing overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous people among those stopped by the Vancouver Police Department for street checks.
- The arrest of peaceful protesters on June 15, who called attention to the destruction of Hogan's Alley, an action for which the City has not apologized nor made reparations.
- The recent report by an Indigenous employee of the City of Vancouver to WorkSafeBC of a culturally unsafe workplace at the City, as reported on 11 June 2020.

These are just some of the most recent issues that have come to the attention of the committee, and demonstrate a pattern of persistent and widespread colonial violence that impacts the lives of Indigenous people in Vancouver. While Vancouver aspires to be a "City of Reconciliation," we see much more attention focused on consultations and dialogue, without the corresponding commitments of action and meaningful change. From our perspective, the continued refrain of "starting a conversation" and "engaging in a dialogue" feels disingenuous when we see so little impact resulting from them.

To that end, the committee is issuing the following requests for information and immediate action from the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver School Board, and Vancouver Park Board:

Mayor and Council

- That Mayor Stewart meet with the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee, as a gesture of his stated commitment to listening to Indigenous leaders and a first step towards deepening relationships with urban Indigenous peoples within the city.
- That Mayor and Council apply an equity lens to forthcoming budgeting decisions for the next fiscal period, ensuring that critical resourcing for Indigenous communities are not perceived as "optional" investments in a City of Reconciliation.

The City of Vancouver

- That the City of Vancouver provides information to the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee on how allegations of racism and culturally unsafe work conditions by employees are addressed, and what steps

have been taken to address previous complaints by the next Regular Meeting of the Committee (September 14, 2020).

- That the City of Vancouver collect and share data on Indigenous staff recruitment and retention within the City with the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee, so we can better understand how Indigenous perspectives are incorporated into City operations.
- That the City of Vancouver commit to provide culturally responsive supports to Indigenous staff (e.g. the resourcing of time with Elders) in recognition of the emotional labour of working within colonial political structures.
- That the City commit to the creation of a dedicated Indigenous Relations department, to provide leadership on initiatives and activities that impact Indigenous people.
- That the City of Vancouver allocates the necessary resources to expedite its work on an Equity Framework in recognition of the urgency of its application to all aspects of its operations.

Vancouver Police Department

- That the Vancouver Police Department appoint a liaison to the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee, and include the committee in dialogue on next steps for addressing racism and colonialism perpetrated by the police.
- That the Vancouver Police Department immediately end the practice of street checks.

Vancouver School Board

- That the Vancouver School Board provide an action plan on how the adoption of UNDRIP will be implemented at Vancouver schools, including commitments on dedicated funding and resourcing.
- That the Vancouver School Board commit to the renaming of Gladstone Secondary School, with a new name to be chosen in consultation with the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.
- That the Vancouver School Board consult with Black and Indigenous community leaders regarding the termination of the School Liaison Officer program, and commit to a decision on the matter prior to September 2020.
- That the Vancouver School Board ensures that the development of a new Land and Asset strategy plan is rooted in its commitment to UNDRIP, including fully resourcing meaningful engagement and leadership from the local Nations and the urban Indigenous community.

Vancouver Park Board

- That the Vancouver Park Board continue the work of developing and actioning a Decolonization Strategy, fully resourcing and staffing this critical work moving forward.

The work of reconciliation is urgent and ongoing, requiring a deeply held commitment to continually challenging and dismantling colonial mindsets and systems causing harm. For far too long, the City of Vancouver has prided itself in its designation as a City of Reconciliation by referencing past successes - of the 6 notable actions referenced in this year's statement on Indigenous Peoples' Day, 4 were launched or completed by 2014. This is simply not acceptable, and as a committee we have grown tired of symbolic gestures and empty promises. In 2014 the City of Vancouver rose to meet the call of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee - as we mark one year since the release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and in a year in which societal inequities and injustices have been made so strikingly clear, where is the city's leadership in this critical time?

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