



BCAAFC | BC Association of
Aboriginal Friendship Centres



Media Statement: Racism against Indigenous Cultural Leader by Hyatt Regency Vancouver Staff Prompts Call for Action

March 10, 2023

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) and First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) are calling for swift action following the racist and disturbing mistreatment of a First Nations man who is a beloved Cultural Advisor and staff member of the BCAAFC by the Hyatt Regency Vancouver. We call on the Hyatt Regency to uphold the safety of Indigenous peoples, to provide mandatory anti-racism training for all staff, to demonstrate accountability for the harm they have caused, and to offer a public apology.

From February 23-25 BCAAFC hosted a membership meeting at the Hyatt Regency Vancouver hotel for staff and youth from 25 BC Friendship Centres. After dinner on Friday, February 24, the respected Cultural Advisor and community member needed to use the restroom urgently. He sought the closest available restroom where the BCAAFC meetings had occurred over the previous two days in the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

He was refused access to the restroom by a Hyatt Regency employee, despite repeated pleas to use the toilet. After a fourth and urgent request to enter the restroom, the Hyatt Regency again barred access until the Cultural Advisor could no longer control their need to use the toilet, resulting in a public and humiliating incident. Nearby onlookers witnessed the incident take place. The Cultural Advisor recounts how the Hyatt Regency employee mocked them and smirked after noticing their wet clothing. The BCAAFC Cultural Advisor was extremely humiliated and traumatized.

The Hyatt Regency employee allowed the BCAAFC Cultural Advisor access to the washroom only after it was too late.

Furthermore, the response from Hyatt Regency management has failed to acknowledge this act of anti-Indigenous racism and harm, and the larger issue of systemic racism that so commonly targets Indigenous people.

After being initially dismissed by upper management, the Cultural Advisor received a brief apology that interpreted the incident as a “misunderstanding,” that the staff person was “only doing his job,” and offered a meagre breakfast voucher as compensation.

The day after the incident, BCAAFC Executive Director Leslie Varley was denied the opportunity to speak with higher level management about this violation of a human right. After learning of the incident, BCAAFC staff pre-emptively concluded the meeting at the Hyatt Regency and withdrew from the hotel to safeguard our community from further violence and racism.

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

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The behaviour of the Hyatt Regency employee and response from management was abhorrent, unreasonable, and displayed a gross lack of respect for the dignity and well-being of the respected knowledge keeper. It must be made clear that the discriminatory refusal of a person's basic needs was the result of systemic anti-Indigenous racism and is nothing short of a human rights violation. Corporations that profit from our community must be made aware that mistreatment and anti-Indigenous racism will be called out and investigated with immediacy.

We have significant concerns for the safety of Indigenous peoples at Hyatt Regency that must be addressed. Over the past eight months BCAAFC staff have planned the upcoming March 22-25 *Gathering Our Voices (GOV): Indigenous Youth Leadership Training* event to take place at the Hyatt Regency Vancouver.

We cannot, in good conscience, allow a gathering of 1,000 Indigenous youth take place at a venue where violence and racism have recently occurred and may occur again. BCAAFC is now actively seeking alternative locations for events previously scheduled at the Hyatt Regency.

We call on the Hyatt Regency Vancouver to publicly apologize to BCAAFC staff and to all Indigenous peoples for enabling racist behaviour of their staff. We call on the Hyatt Regency Vancouver to take action to amend policy, procedures and practices to address Indigenous-specific racism including providing mandatory anti-racism training for staff, as outlined by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

To be clear, BCAAFC is not seeking a financial compensation. Further, BCAAFC does not want the Hyatt to address this as merely one employee's action. We seek to ensure all staff are trained to understand their biases against Indigenous peoples and enact measures to ensure systemic racism is addressed throughout the Hyatt organization.

BCAAFC is seeking additional volunteers for the March 22-25 *Gathering Our Voices (GOV): Indigenous Youth Leadership Training* event to assist in keeping Indigenous youth safe.

BCAAFC and the FNLC stand firmly with our relative and cultural leader who experienced profound harm and raise our hands to them for their courage and strength in coming forward in the pursuit of justice, to demand dignity and human rights for our future generations.

On behalf of the undersigned:

Leslie Varley, Executive Director, BCAAFC
Elijah Mack, President, BCAAFC
Carole Camille, Board Member, BCAAFC
Cal Albright, Board Member, BCAAFC
Rosanna McGregor, Board Member
Fabian Alexis, Board Member, BCAAFC
Tami Omeasoo, Board Member, BCAAFC
Cyndi Stephens, Board Member, BCAAFC

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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

Cheryl Casimer

Robert Phillips

Hugh Braker

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip

Chief Don Tom

Chief Marilyn Slett

On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:

Regional Chief Terry Teegee

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Apply to volunteer at GOV2023: gatheringourvoices.ca/volunteer/

