

Reconciliation Pole Installation Remarks

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Remarks for Reconciliation Pole Installation: We cannot change the past but we can honestly embrace it

I begin by acknowledging all the Elders, Chiefs, and Matriarchs, distinguished and honoured guests, and by welcoming all of you, our many friends and family. We are so honoured to have you with us. Thank you for your work, your leadership and support, and for joining us today.

I am thrilled to be with you, and to be a part of history in the making. It is truly a great honour to participate and to bear witness to what, for many of us, is surely a once-in-a-lifetime event.

I want to thank all of you who have come together from so many places and worked for so long to join in the important work of developing respectful and productive relationships between our communities. In particular, I extend warm thanks to our host nations – upon whose traditional territories our campuses are located.

All of you have worked really hard – with patience, diligence and unwavering commitment – to build a road to better relations and a better future. I salute you. The road continues to be a long one, and I am deeply humbled and honoured to be on this journey with you.

A university is a place where people of all ages and backgrounds come together – to teach, to learn, to question, and to discover the truth of things. Two remarkable initiatives at UBC are now further reflecting upon the truth of our shared history, and offering hope and inspiration for the future.

One is the 55-foot pole we will place today – called “Reconciliation Pole” – by master carver 7idansuu (pronounced ee-dan-suu) James Hart, Haida Hereditary Chief. The other is the new UBC Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre – or IRSC, that is currently under construction on the other end of Main Mall.

Together, they will provide a landmark and a place to better understand the history and lasting effects of Canada’s Indian residential schools. We cannot change the past, but we can honestly recognize it. As the scales fall from our eyes, we can see clearly what we did not see before.

Witnessing “Reconciliation Pole” today, we can’t help but feel pain and sorrow. The work tells the story of the time before, during, and after the Indian residential school system – a system that caused so much harm. We may also feel a sense of deep gratitude, for only in learning the truth can we work together, towards a better future.

UBC was honoured to partner with the Audain Foundation to commission this beautiful and powerful work. I wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Michael Audain, 7idansuu, and the team of carvers, who have made this historic landmark possible.

This brings me to the second initiative. The Pole will face in the direction of the UBC Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre located between Koerner Library and the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.

The IRSC will open in the next academic year, and provide residential school survivors and communities access to the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and ways for students, faculty, visitors—ways for all of us—to learn about the history and lasting effects of Indian residential schools, and the larger systems of which they were a part.

Working in partnership with the National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg, the centre will focus on the experiences of Indigenous people across Canada, but especially in British Columbia. The centre will provide onsite access to records and information, and also electronic tools that provide access across Canada and around the world. It will be a place to explore contemporary relationships, and to develop ways of thinking and working together that will benefit us all.

Much good work has been done, but there is still so much more to do. A continued commitment to truth, respect and understanding, will enable us to deepen our work and contribute to a better future.

I am so grateful to all of you for being here on this extraordinary day. I'm looking forward to hearing the other speakers and joining in the placing of the pole. This is truly a day to celebrate and to remember. Thank you again for being here and for joining us in this historic event.