

Media Advisory

CCNC Toronto Chapter applauds the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act apology from Prime Minister

TORONTO – (June 22, 2006) The Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter applauds the apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper for the injustices inflicted by the Chinese Head Tax (1885-1923) and Exclusion Act (1923-1947).

Since 1885, when the government of that day imposed a head tax on Chinese immigrants which was repealed in 1923 and replaced with the Chinese Immigration Act (known as Chinese Exclusion Act) to exclude all Chinese immigrants from coming to Canada. As a result, many Chinese families were separated for decades and some of them had never been able to reunite in Canada.

An official apology for the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the House of Commons today is an historical moment in the Chinese Canadian community. The apology and redress for Canada's racist Head Tax and Exclusion Act is a movement for racial equality in Canada.

Kristyn Wong-Tam, past President of CCNC Toronto Chapter who rode the "Redress Express" to Ottawa to witness the apology from Parliament Hill comments that, "Prime Minister Harper has demonstrated the leadership and courage that has been missing from previous governments and prime ministers, when he stood up in the House to admit that a grave mistake was made.

Although symbolic financial compensation was allocated by the Prime Minister for actual head tax payers and their spouses, Wong-Tam suggests that, "Regardless of the financial amount determined by the government, the collective pain suffered by early Chinese settlers and their descendants, who were forcefully separated from their families for decades and in many cases, forever, can never be fully redress by any amount of money. I am just so happy to know that some of our pioneers lived to see the day that their contribution to nation-building was recognized and the official apology that they have been waiting for all their lives was delivered in a meaningful manner by this sitting Prime Minister."

Today is only the beginning. We hope the government will follow their commitment in implementing the Community Historical Recognition Program, and raise awareness of the injustices imposed by the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act.

CCNC Toronto Chapter is a 26-year old organization of Chinese Canadians in the City of Toronto that promotes equity, social justice, inclusive civic participation, and respect for diversity.

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