



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2021

Phil Fontaine to represent Manitoba First Nations at meeting with Pope Francis

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse of the Office of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Manitoba Region, today announced the appointment of Phil Fontaine as the Manitoba representative to the First Nations delegation scheduled to travel to the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis this December.

“It is my honour to announce that former Grand Chief and former National Chief Phil Fontaine will represent Manitoba First Nations as part of the First Nations delegation scheduled to meet with the Pope this December,” stated Regional Chief Woodhouse. “Mr. Fontaine will participate in discussions regarding reconciliation with First Nations for the role of the Catholic Church in the administration of the former Indian Residential Schools, and the need for an official apology from the Pope on behalf of the Catholic Church.”

Mr. Fontaine, a former Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) Grand Chief and three-time AFN National Chief, led the negotiations that resulted in the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). The IRSSA is the largest class action lawsuit in the history of the country. The former National Chief first began speaking about his traumatic experiences at the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School over 30 years ago. These revelations, along with the voices of other Survivors, led to increased awareness about the tragic legacy of the Indian Residential School System. The IRSSA included provisions for a Common Experience Payment for survivors of Indian Residential Schools, an Independent Assessment Process for individual abuse claims and education funding to be addressed, plus the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The recent discovery of mass unmarked graves on the grounds of former residential schools in British Columbia and Saskatchewan in May and June of 2021 has sparked renewed attention on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report 94 Calls to Action. Many of the Calls to Action remain unaddressed, including the need for an apology from the Pope to Survivors, their families and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools.

Indigenous leaders and representatives will be in Rome from December 17th to 20th and are scheduled to meet with Pope Francis at the Vatican during that time.

Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse is a member of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of First Nations and is a proud member of the Pinaymootang First Nation in Treaty 2 Territory.

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Curtis Mallett

Email: cmallett@manitobachiefs.com

Phone: 1-204- 795-1742