

United Church, Ottawa must pay for residential school abuse, court rules

VANCOUVER -The United Church of Canada and the federal government must pay for sexual and physical abuse children suffered at a Vancouver Island native residential school, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled Thursday.

Both the church and government had denied responsibility for the Alberni Indian residential school and the abuse inflicted by a man now serving 11 years in prison.

But the court ruled that the school was a joint venture, so both should pay.

"This is a giant step forward for us and will give us strength to continue with the court case until we win full compensation," said Randy Fred, spokesman for the plaintiffs.

Justice Donald Brenner decided only on the matter of whether the church or Ottawa was responsible, and who should pay. Another hearing must be held to determine the amount of compensation.

"It's a major victory for

my clients who have suffered a very great deal and should be entitled to move ahead with their healing," said Vancouver lawyer Peter Grant, who represented most of the 30 people suing the church and government.

Almost all of the plaintiffs were sexually abused and beaten by Arthur Plint, who worked as a dormitory supervisor at the school between 1948 and 1968.

Plint, 80, pleaded guilty in 1995 to dozens of sexual assaults on aboriginal boys. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison by a judge who called him a "sexual terrorist."

Both the United Church and the federal government had denied responsibility for hiring Plint.

There were 18 Indian residential schools in British Columbia and more than 80 across Canada.

They were run by churches under contract to the federal government from the early 1800s until the mid-1980s.-CP-