

United Church appeals B.C. court ruling

by Andrea Buma

VANCOUVER - Shocking tales of murder and medical experimentation at British Columbia residential schools were revealed at an inquiry held by the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM) in Vancouver last month.

Eyewitness accounts by students of the Port Alberni residential school in particular are unprecedented.

For example, many are reporting highly questionable procedures being performed on young students. One group remembers very long needles being inserted into tissues of young boys, and that one of them subsequently

died.

IHRAAM director Rudy James says that these stories need further investigation on. "I think there are undoubtedly several points of very serious interest to us. This was heart-rending evidence, very serious charges that we are trying to assess," says James.

IHRAAM is currently compiling information gathered at the tribunal into an executive summary that will be presented to the High Commissioner of the United Nations in a meeting in London, England at the end of July.

... Continued on page 2

Church appeals court

Continued from front page

Copies of the report will also go to the entities responsible for administering the residential schools: the Canadian government; and the United, Catholic, and Anglican churches.

James says the international community will wait for a response from these entities before taking any action.

"IHRAAM is interested in their response. If they don't make one, that is a response in itself. Then there will be other, very serious steps taken," says James.

Details of possible actions are not available yet, but there is a danger that Canada's otherwise stellar reputation could be seriously tarnished in the international community.

"These entities know what they need to do. That's why we give them this opportunity to do the proper thing. The final chapter in this has not been written, that will be when proper restitution is made to the victims."

According to James, victims of the residential school system have no faith in the "healing fund" being established by the government with a \$350 million dollar payment.

He says that while the Aboriginal Healing Foundation may provide some education and awareness of the residential school problems, IHRAAM is concerned that the money will not reach victims.

He says that recent B.C. supreme court decisions have established the guilt of the parties involved in residential schools, so now "the thing uppermost in our mind is that the victims receive redress for the wrongs they endured."

The United Church of Canada recently decided to appeal a B.C. Supreme Court ruling that found it jointly liable for

the sexual abuse of students at the Port Alberni school, which was run by the United Church.

United Church moderator Bill Phipps says that the judge was wrong to conclude that the church should be held responsible for the sexual assaults committed by their employee Arthur Plint.

"We had a part in the residential school system. But it's a huge step to say that we are accountable for the actions of employees," said Phipps.

United Church of Canada spokesperson Mary Frances Dinil told the *Teka* that the United Church is not prepared to comment on tribunal findings.

"We don't know who this Rudy James is, or who IHRAAM are. We didn't attend the tribunal

because we don't know who this body is, who is responsible for running the tribunal," said Dinil.

The second main concern of the tribunal is that allegations of murder and medical experimentation receive a full investigation, "there is no statute of limitations

on murder. But the victims have reason to doubt the impartiality of the RCMP. They would like an independent body to investigate."

The international tribunal judges that met last month in Vancouver are currently writing their reports, which will be sent to head judge George Sukinaw. James figures he will have Sukinaw's findings in 2-3 weeks, at which time he will finish his report.

"It's a process, it takes time to be done properly," says James. "to some of the victims the pace is frustrating, but large organizations do not respond immediately. I do expect the involved entities to respond in a responsible fashion."

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***Bill Phipps
United Church Moderator***