

On the occasion of the conferring of
the degree of
Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*
upon

Phil Fontaine

Canadians pride themselves on their quest to achieve a truly civil society. All members, new and old, indigenous and immigrant, will be treated with decency and respect. Justice will, indeed, be blind. It should not matter whether one's family has lived in this land for days, centuries, or millennia.

And yet, there are chapters in our county's history, which are blights on this inspired goal. Certainly one of the most shameful is the way in which First Nations peoples were treated under the policy of residential school relocations.

Trying to assimilate one social group to the language and culture of another via government policy robs them of their dignity and core values. These policies hurt *all* Canadians; not just the targeted children.

Phil Fontaine has fought, reasoned, and argued - for most of his life - to try to right some of these grievous wrongs.

It is fitting to honour him today, almost a year to the day from the time that the federal government officially apologized to the First Nations peoples for their shameful treatment in residential schools. Fontaine was instrumental in bringing about this notable apology which also included an unprecedented truth and reconciliation process. This is crucial in that apologies are not just about the past, but also about looking toward the future.

Chief Fontaine has always been a strong advocate of finding a way to make new relationships work - from land claims to self-government policies. Canadians are defined by the land. As Woody Guthrie wrote, "The fog was lifting, a voice come chanting, This land was made for you *and* me."

Our lives are defined by the choices we make. We can choose to build up or tear down in our pursuit of change and justice. Eminent Chancellor, let us honour today one who has chosen the path of building up, of looking forward, without dishonouring, or ignoring, the past. Let us recognize this champion of the quintessentially Canadian yearning for a civil and just society.

On behalf of the Senate and the University, I invite you to invest National Chief Phil Fontaine with the degree Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.