

## Saskatchewan offers Klassen no apology



Photo: Don Healy/CP

Saskatchewan Justice Minister Frank Quennell attends a news conference Thursday in Regina.

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Saskatchewan Justice Minister Frank Quennell offered no apology Thursday to the 12 members of the Klassen family falsely accused of abusing foster children, announcing that the provincial government plans

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to appeal a Dec. 30 judgment that the 12 were victims of malicious prosecution in the case.

"No apology," Mr. Quennell told reporters. "It is our position that the crown prosecutors did not commit a wrong and there is no reason why they would be required to apologize in that circumstance."

Justice George Baynton ruled Dec. 30 on a lawsuit filed by the 12 that the plaintiffs were maliciously prosecuted by Saskatoon police Superintendent Brian Dueck, therapist Carol Bunko-Ruys and Crown prosecutor Matthew Miazga, calling the case a "travesty of justice."

Government lawyer Don McKillop said Thursday he will appeal the malicious prosecution finding on behalf of his clients — a decision the Attorney-General of Saskatchewan has decided to support.

"It is our view that the judge erred in his judgement," Mr. Quennell said. "This judgment significantly changes the criteria for malicious prosecution from the one outlined by the Supreme Court of Canada and therefore has grave consequences for the administration of justice in Saskatchewan.

"We need clarity on the law — and the only way to obtain that is to appeal the judgment."

Richard Klassen told CBC Newsworld he wasn't expecting an apology to come Thursday.

"It was not something I was expected from the Saskatchewan government," Mr. Klassen said. "They took us this far... I think the damages will go forward and I fully intend to proceed on with the damages trial."

"We were vindicated on one hand ... and then on the other hand they're saying they did nothing wrong. Clearly there's a difference here and I guess the system goes that way. I will continue to fight."

Mr. Quennell did offer his sympathy to all of those who have had their lives consumed by the case.

"It is clear from the judgment that there has been a great deal of suffering and upheaval in the lives of many, many people over more than a decade," he said. "This is truly a regrettable situation and I extend my deepest sympathy to all those involved."

The Saskatoon Police department apologized to the Klassen family at a press conference Wednesday.

"The judgment in this case vindicates the plaintiffs for the criminal charges they faced," Chief Russell Sabo said. "Based on the information contained in the judgment, as the chief of police of the Saskatoon police service, my sympathy goes to each and every person that was wrongfully charged and

I extend my apologies to them for any part that the Saskatoon police service played in this case."

The Klassen family members were falsely accused 12 years ago of abusing three young foster children in bizarre ways -- forcing them to eat eyeballs, drink blood, participate in orgies and watch newborn babies get skinned and buried.

The whole ordeal, according to published reports and court documents, began back in 1987 when three foster children all under the age of 10 -- a boy and his younger twin sisters -- were put in the Saskatoon home of Mr. Klassen's brother and sister-in-law.

The young boy was abusive to his two sisters -- both physically and sexually -- and he was eventually removed from the home.

That's when he started telling police about horrific abuse that he said he and his sisters had suffered. As police worked the case, the children were reunited and shortly after, the sisters backed up their brother's claims. The children have all since revealed the stories had been made up.

Saskatoon police called it the "scandal of the century" at the time, but most of the cases never made it to trial. By 1993 most of the charges were stayed.

While monetary compensation was not mentioned in Judge Baynton's ruling, the Klassen family is said to be seeking at least \$10-million in damages.

"We all want our lives back and we can't get it back," Mr. Klassen said. "This is hanging over our heads and I don't know if any dollar figure is going to help that, but certainly I want this case over."

Mr. Klassen maintains that a full public inquiry into the case should be called.

*With a file from Canadian Press*



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