



Ahenakew apologizes for anti-Jewish remarks



CTV News Staff

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Saskatchewan native leader David Ahenakew has made a tearful apology for remarks he made last week in which he applauded Adolf Hitler for the Holocaust. He says he deeply regrets the words and has decided to resign from all positions with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

"I want to publicly state that words cannot describe how sorry I am and for the hurt I have caused. I want to extend my most sincere apologies to the Jewish community, to Holocaust survivors and your families. Such comment has no excuse," he told a news conference.

Ahenakew, 68, then directed his apology to the people of Saskatchewan, to war veterans, his family, and to aboriginal peoples and leaders across the country.

"I have clearly embarrassed our people. I admit my own stubbornness, my pig-headedness, and my own personal embarrassment have prevented me from coming forward immediately to do the right thing in light of what I have caused with such irresponsible and painful comments," he said, holding back tears.

"Obviously, I got carried away last Friday, I got caught up in the heat of the moment. I was attempting to spark a debate about what's been happening to our First Nations people. I obviously lost my focus. My comments came out in anger and frustration... I will not make excuses."

Ahenakew, a former leader of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), was meant to be speaking about the FSIN's position on health care at a news conference last week. Instead, he launched into an angry rant.

Ahenakew said that while serving in the army, Germans had told him Jews had started the war. Later, in an interview with a reporter from the Saskatoon StarPhoenix, he was asked to clarify his statements and Ahenakew said he agreed with his German friends.

He said Hitler "fried six million of those guys" because he was "going to make damn sure that the Jews didn't take over Germany or Europe."

"And look what they're doing. They're killing people in Arab countries."

His comments were met by shock, rage, and embarrassment from native leaders, Prime Minister Jean Chretien and many others. The Canadian Jewish Congress called for Ahenakew's Order of Canada, bestowed on him in 1978, to be revoked.

On Tuesday, the CJC called the apology a "positive gesture." But president Keith Landy stopped short of accepting Ahenakew's apology, saying the nature of his comments were so "monstrous" that the Jewish community will need time to absorb what has happened.

The FSIN accepted Ahenakew's resignation Tuesday. Chief Perry



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Bellegarde said the FSIN's executive council also passed a motion formally apologizing to the Jewish community.

"We recognize his contributions but there's no way we can condone what he said," Bellegarde said.

Meanwhile, the Saskatchewan government said an RCMP investigation of Ahenakew's comments will continue. Saskatchewan Justice Minister Chris Axworthy said the apology does not resolve the matter, noting that the province has deep issues of race relations, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

It is a crime to "publicly incite hatred" under Section 319 of the Criminal Code.

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