# Protest, cheers, greet Pope Francis on stage in Iqaluit

# Pope Francis apologizes for the role of 'not just a few Catholics' in residential schools

David Venn Local Journalism **Initiative Reporter** 

Approximately 1,000 people gathered outside Nakasuk Elementary School on July 29 to hear Pope Francis apologize for abuses committed by some Catholics within the residential school system.

Francis took a seat on a sealskin-covered white chair to cheers and applause from the audience at around 5:40 p.m. ET and delivered his speech approximately 30 minutes later, after taking in a number of Inuit cultural performances.

"I want to tell you how very sorry I am and to ask for forgiveness for the evil perpetrated by not just a few Catholics in these schools who contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation," he said in Spanish.

His words were interpreted into English and Inuktitut for the crowd.

Spectators had begun gathering in the school's parking lot and basketball courts even before the Pope landed at the airport. Around 600 people

were gathered by the time the master of ceremonies, Lisa Koperqualuk, introduced the first performers of the evening at 4 p.m.: Huqqullaaqatigiit, а singing and drum dancing group of seven people from Cambridge Bay.

Arviat throat singers Mary Anowtalik and Lois Suluk-Locke performed after, followed by Puvirnituq throat singers Akinisie Sivuarapik and Amaly Sallualuk.

Nunatsiavut singer Deantha Edmunds also sang two songs from her new album.

When Francis arrived on stage, he was met with more performances from the opening acts, as well as from Piita Irniq.

Irniq, who was one of several residential school survivors who met with Francis privately inside the school, drum danced, then spoke to the crowd before gifting his drum to the Pope.

"In the old days, we danced when we were happy ... Today, we are happy because the Pope is visiting us," Irniq said. "Welcome to the Inuit homeland."

Over the span of an hour, Francis delivered a speech that touched on residential schools, motivation for youth and Inuit culture.

He thanked Irniq and the other survivors who

shared their stories with him privately.

"I thank you for having had the courage to tell your stories and to share your great suffering. I had not imagined the suffering," he said. "This only renewed in me the indignation and shame that I have felt for months.

"How evil it is to break the bonds uniting parents and children, to damage

our closest relationships, to harm and scandalize the little ones."

He spoke to the relationship Inuit have with the land.

"reconciliation

fied colonialism.

truth and action" and "re-

scind the Doctrine of Dis-

covery," which refers to a

historical edict that justi-

"Every child matters."

One spectator shouted,

But Francis left the

stage waving to the crowd

— some who yelled, "We

love you," some who

equals

"There is a beautiful relationship between you and this land you inhabit, because it too is strong and resilient," he said.

During his speech, a few members of the audience held signs that read,



Drum dancer Noah Kudlak from the performance group Huqqullaaqatigiit dances close to Pope Francis on July 29 in front of Nakasuk Elementary School in Iqaluit. (Photo by David Venn) 

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