



RECONCILIATION

A WORK IN PROGRESS



Reconciliation: A Work in Progress

Aboriginal Healing Foundation
75 Albert Street, Suite 801, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E7
Phone: (613) 237-4441
Toll-free: (888) 725-8886
Fax: (613) 237-4442
Email: research@ahf.ca
Website: www.ahf.ca

Helping Aboriginal people heal themselves



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Aboriginal Healing Foundation

2010

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE
BY GEORGES ERASMUS
PRESIDENT, ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

RECONCILIATION: A WORK IN PROGRESS

On 20–21 February 2009, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation hosted a two-day gathering of colleagues to deliberate public engagement in the approaching Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Even the narrowest of topic will engender diversity of outlook, but here the purpose was not to contract a discussion, but to bring a wide-ranging collection of perspectives into the service of a shared, and focused, vista populated by opportunity.

This report is perhaps best read alongside *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey* and *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, two previous works published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF). With the release of this report, the participants keep alive a discussion whose beginnings precede the AHF and, I expect, will succeed it as well. The discussion, complex and at times contradictory, is nonetheless situated atop a simple consensus: the current relationship between Canada and the original inhabitants of this land cannot persist without mutual detriment. Whatever one's politics, it ought to be clear that the legacy of the past will arrive a shoddy gift to the future.

Formulated in this manner, the stick of failure occludes the carrot of hope. Yet it is the case that many will come to this discussion, if at all, only by the spur of resentment. Let us welcome this, too, as the opportunity that it presents. Those already engaged in the work of reconciliation have only sheer indifference against them, and indifference is quite rare.

In Aboriginal communities throughout Canada, dedicated people have long been at the flesh-and-blood work of battling addiction, suicide, and despair. What began in the 1960s as an awareness-raising campaign against drug and alcohol abuse has evolved into a worldwide, Aboriginal-led healing movement informed by an understanding of intergenerational historic trauma. The grassroots individuals who put their shoulders into

the uphill push for community wellness became, in many instances, the movers behind the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*. It is thus no accident that the promise of an expanding healing movement has informed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A willingness both to speak and to hear personal truth will promote healing, and healing will bring us closer to reconciliation.

These, in broad strokes, constitute the opportunity posed by the Commission. The TRC is often characterized as a process or an event, but it may better be construed as a series of physical spaces into which to bring one's truth for the purpose of sharing. Such a thing has never before been done in Canada, and it may never happen again. With this in mind, I encourage you to spend some time with this report. Share it with your friends and colleagues, and consider this your opportunity to become a part of the discussion.

On behalf of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Board and staff, I thank the participants in the Civil Society Engagement Think Tank for their time and their dedication to this work. The support of old friends and allies over the years has been invaluable to the AHF in ways it would be impossible here to properly recount. And there are many new friends and allies, too, to thank and welcome as we move forward. Above all, I acknowledge the many individuals who have made it their life's work to bring healing, wellness, and hope to this and future generations of Aboriginal people.

Masi,

Georges Erasmus
Ottawa, Ontario



Children in school
Eskimo Point, Northwest Territories
Photographer: Donald B. Marsh
The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, P75-103-S1-179
(This photo can be found in the Legacy of Hope Foundation's
"We were so far away...": *The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools* exhibit)

RECONCILIATION A WORK IN PROGRESS

INTRODUCTION

Human relationships are at the core of the work in moving from truth toward reconciliation. The Indian residential school system and the policies that informed it have shaped the history surrounding the relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal people. Through treaty negotiations, Aboriginal people allowed colonial settlers use of their lands in exchange for a variety of goods and services, among other terms, which included training children in the skills of agriculture and animal husbandry. The original purpose for this training was not to supplant Aboriginal cultures but to enhance and sustain them into a future that would be forever changed by the introduction of the European settlers' way of life. The churches saw these developments as an opportunity to build on their efforts to Christianize Indians and, thus, entered into a formal relationship with a government eager to relieve its treaty obligations. The Indian residential school system was used as a vehicle for forcible assimilation of Indians into Canadian society, intended to solve "the Indian problem" and open the land fully to colonial settlement. The relationship that originally seemed to come from good faith and mutual respect between peoples gave way to a relationship of convenience, coercion, and advantage. The concerns and interests of Aboriginal people were displaced by the nation building of a colonial state. When viewed from the perspective of human relationships, Aboriginal people have felt this painful betrayal, which has continued throughout history.

How many people know of this history? According to a 2008 national benchmark survey commissioned by Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to determine communication impact on the awareness of Aboriginal issues and the Indian residential schools issue, approximately half of Canada's non-Aboriginal population had heard about this issue just before Canada's public apology to Survivors of Indian residential schools on 11 June 2008, with only a third being familiar with the issue (Environics,

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This is not an
 Aboriginal issue.
 It is a Canadian
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 It belongs to all of
 us and we to it.

2008). As scholar Trudy Govier points out, Canada turns away from residential schools and other events of our colonial history because the stories “are unpleasant and incompatible with the favoured picture we have of ourselves, and they imply a need for restitution and redress, threatening our rather comfortable way of life” (2003:78). She says we must acknowledge that “through patterns of colonization, land use, racism, disregard for treaties, and the residential school system, [that] we are linked significantly to the institutions that are responsible ... we share responsibility for these things” and we “are beneficiaries of the injustices” (2003:78–79). And, as one think tank participant put it, “This is not an Aboriginal issue. It is a Canadian issue. It is part of Canadian history. It belongs to all of us and we to it.” Still, we must ask, how do the parties committed to reconciliation spark interest in the Canadian public and engage people in this discussion and related efforts?

How do we ensure that we achieve a full and fruitful dialogue, one that both tackles assumptions and misconceptions and provides bridges where required? Some have recently promoted the concept of Canada’s founding peoples as Aboriginal, English, and French, a concept which, at face-value, is progressive. But do we make yet another assumption here that Aboriginal peoples have been formally and/or in meaningful ways engaged in the development and realization of this idea? Do Aboriginal communities see themselves as having been invited into Confederation?

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is mandated, as part of the larger *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* agreed to by the Government of Canada, the churches that ran the schools, and parties representing the interests of former students of Indian residential schools, to support a process of truth telling that will lead to reconciliation between those affected by the legacy of residential schools, those responsible for this wrong, and Canadians generally.

One of the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to educate Canadians about the impacts of Indian residential schools and, more specifically, to increase people’s understanding of the negative impacts these schools have had on the lives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and communities. In order to share this knowledge, all parties need to understand exactly who will receive this information—the audiences—and what these audiences understand concepts of truth

and reconciliation to be and what these mean to each individual and/or community. And each of us must place residential schools within the larger historical context.

There are multiple meanings when defining reconciliation with respect to the Indian residential school issue. Many people perceive the term as relating to closure, forgiveness, or moving on. Others relate it to awareness of the issue, making peace between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and making amends or apologizing (Envionics, 2008).

We can, of course, begin with a simple dictionary definition, as the word “reconciliation” is sufficiently common place. *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary* defines the term as: “1. The act of reconciling, or the state of being reconciled; reconcilment; restoration to harmony; renewal of friendship. 2. Reduction to congruence or consistency; removal of inconsistency; harmony.” More contextually, with regard to truth and reconciliation commissions, Brian Rice and Anna Snyder have defined truth commissions, generally, as follows: “There are five general aims of a TRC: 1) to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; 2) to respond to specific needs of victims; 3) to contribute to justice and accountability; 4) to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and 5) to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past” (2008:46). And the mandate itself of Canada’s Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, known as Schedule ‘N’, defines reconciliation in the following manner: “Reconciliation is an ongoing individual and collective process, and will require commitment from all those affected including First Nations, Inuit and Métis former Indian Residential School (IRS) students, their families, communities, religious entities, former school employees, government and the people of Canada. Reconciliation may occur between any of the above groups” (Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, 2006).

With this in mind, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation hosted a Think Tank on Civil Society Engagement and Reconciliation to build on previous engagement activities and into ongoing efforts. This gathering took place on 20–21 February 2009 at the Delta Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario. The two Foundations invited a range of individuals and professionals from a variety of fields to explore

*Canadians need to come to understand that one of the most important defining elements of Canadian identity is Aboriginal and as long as that realization is absent or insufficiently respected, Canadian society will be fundamentally undermined by historical and continuing social injustice.
(Think Tank participant)*

the broad topics of reconciliation and residential schools and to find meaningful ways in which to engage Canadians on these issues.¹

Pre-interviews were conducted with 25 people who have interests in communications, outreach and engagement, information campaigns, residential schools, health and health promotion, and work in non-profit organizations, governments, universities, and the media. They were asked to share their thoughts and experiences in an exploration of how the many parties committed to reconciliation might engage Canadians generally on the issue of residential schools, truth, and reconciliation. These interviews enabled the organizers to develop specific thematic areas for discussion before the gathering and informed the discussions at the think tank.

Over 45 people attended the think tank, which included opening remarks by Shelagh Rogers and addresses by residential school Survivors Elijah Harper, Chief Robert Joseph, and Maggie Hodgson. There were smaller group discussions around the themes of creating alliances, getting people to care, and dealing with emotional issues.

Many specific communications and outreach recommendations came out of the think tank, and some have been included here. What follows is a discussion of some of the key considerations that participants voiced, in their own words where possible and paraphrased as necessary; quotations from participants have been inserted or summarized to articulate larger ideas about engagement and reconciliation. The contributions by think tank participants have been organized here thematically under the headings *Engagement and Reconciliation*, *Education and Knowledge Sharing*, *Emotional Issues and Historic Trauma*, *Sensitive Messages*, and *Framing Truth and Reconciliation: Strengths-Based Messaging*, rather than chronologically along the lines of the event's agenda. From these discussions, participants identified important actions that need to be considered to inform any future work around society's engagement in reconciliation.

¹ The agenda for the think tank is attached as Appendix 1. For a list of participating organizations, please see Appendix 2.



St. George's Indian Residential School
Lytton, British Columbia
Courtesy of Verna Miller

ENGAGEMENT AND RECONCILIATION

“What might it mean to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered?” (Simon, 2005: 88)

How, as members of a collective and an identified society, can we engage ourselves in the lives of others? Several participants pointed out that we must first try to set aside our “Western” ways of thinking and doing and see ourselves collectively as a society built from world views of both Aboriginal and European civilizations, a sentiment that echoes ideas expressed recently by John Ralston Saul in his 2008 book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada* and its ensuing book tour: He believes the ways in which we negotiate for peace rather than strike out in violence are rooted in Aboriginal lifeways. There is a growing number of people who have come to the realization that Canada has grown into a country inspired more by Aboriginal world views than European world views, but there is still a need to get more Canadians to understand that one of the most important defining elements of Canadian identity is Aboriginal and that we are not a nation of two solitudes—English and French (Saul, 2008; 2009). As long as that realization is absent or insufficiently respected, Canadian society will be fundamentally undermined by historical and continuing social injustice. Residential school experiences may have occurred in the past but the legacy continues to affect individuals, families, and communities today.

There is broad ignorance about residential school issues and wider misconceptions about Aboriginal people in general. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, in its popular *Misconceptions of Canada’s Indian Residential School System*, has shared this knowledge with a wide audience, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. However, we understand that much work still needs to be done to replace these misconceptions with the truth. The first truth is simple but profound: residential schools did not exist in a vacuum; they were part of a larger policy of assimilation, to remove the “Indian problem.” We reproduce these misconceptions here.

There is broad ignorance about residential school issues and wider misconceptions about Aboriginal people in general.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF CANADA'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

Residential Schools happened a long time ago. It's history now. Aboriginal people would be better off if they stopped dwelling on the past and got on with their lives

There are approximately 75,000 former students alive today. Residential schools were in operation well into the last quarter of the twentieth century. Gordon Residential School in Saskatchewan did not close until the late 1990s. The abuses did not happen only a long time ago. Furthermore, the residential school introduced features to Aboriginal communities that have been passed on from generation to generation—these are spoken of collectively as the intergenerational legacy of the residential school system. The consequences of the policy of forced assimilation are very much alive in Aboriginal communities.

The schools were well-intentioned. Everyone believed at the time that assimilation was a good policy. Many good people worked in the schools. The schools produced good as well as bad

The students' experiences of residential schools were not all bad. Different people had differing experiences. Many dedicated, good people worked in the system. The system itself however was designed "to educate and colonize a people against their will," as missionary Hugh McKay admitted in 1903. The policy of forced assimilation had many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal critics, but in each case the critics were silenced. A good example is missionary E.F. Wilson, who came into conflict with the Church over his criticism of forced assimilation and his promotion of Aboriginal cultures, languages, and political autonomy. In short, not everyone believed the schools were promoting good policy.

Aboriginal people asked for residential schools

Government funding of Aboriginal education is a legal obligation negotiated by treaty between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal peoples. In exchange for sharing their territories, Aboriginal people wanted schools to provide skills to their children—just as the schools provided them to non-Aboriginal children. They wanted a system based upon consent, not coercion.

Aboriginal people did not request cultural assimilation, nor did they request for their children physical and sexual abuse, deprivation, and humiliation.

No one knew at the time about the conditions of residential schools

There is ample evidence that the church and government worked together to keep known abuses from public view. Their efforts, however, failed. As early as 1920, Canadians could read published reports of the conditions in residential schools. These conditions included inadequate nutrition, inadequate health standards, and inadequate staff training. P.H. Bryce, a government inspector of the schools, concluded that the system was a “national crime.” Even by the standards of the day, the system was appalling. Bryce’s findings were published in *The Montreal Star* and *Saturday Night Magazine*. Nothing, however, changed.

Hardly any Indian children actually attended the schools

Over the period between 1800 and 1990, over 130 residential (boarding, industrial) schools had existed at one time or another. The number of active schools peaked at 80 in 1931. In the early 1900s about one-sixth of children between the ages of 6 and 15 attended these schools. Geoffrey York reports that by the 1940s, about 8,000 Indian children—half the Indian student population—were enrolled in 76 residential schools across the country.

However, these are national averages. In some regions—the North, British Columbia, and the Prairies for examples—the percentages were higher. There are communities that had all their children forcibly removed. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba—which characterized the Indian residential school system as “a conscious, deliberate and often brutal attempt to force Aboriginal people to assimilate”—noted that “for the first time in over 100 years, many families are experiencing a generation of children who live with their parents until their teens.”

In any case, the consequences of the system are not adequately captured by statistics. The school system did not operate in isolation. Residential schools constituted one piece of a larger policy puzzle. Where the residential school system left off—in the effort to solve the “Indian Problem”—the *Indian Act* and the child welfare, reservation, and justice systems took over. It is these larger relationships, and the forced assimilationist policy that informs them, which account for much of the varied conditions of Aboriginal life.

Many participants at the think tank confronted the question of how to communicate the experiences of others and ensure they are relatable. Personal connections were emphasized whenever ideas were exchanged around engagement. For example, one participant said:

The Aboriginal experience of residential schools has to become a “Canadian’s experience” – this is part of our overall shared history – if it remains only an Aboriginal issue, it will remain in the margins of people’s minds, and consequently in the margins of society. (Think Tank participant)

If we are talking about relationship-building there is a Cree word which means, “We are one self as other,” or, you and I have a relationship, you are me and I am you. The important thing is to connect with people by humbly submitting to people who you are and what you know.

Since our collective history informs the present and engagement is a critical part of reconciliation, there needs to be some thought in how stories and memories of residential school Survivors are related. In *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning and Ethics*, Roger Simon has written about how connections between people may give way to a greater understanding of the past and the importance of “*points of connection* between people in regard to a past that they both might acknowledge the touch of” (2005:89).

There are many Aboriginal people who feel distrust towards government and abandoned by a failed system. They feel that they cannot live fulfilling lives without dealing with these challenges that need to be faced:

I, my family, and my friends cannot live a fulfilling and happy life unless others have a fulfilling and happy life. I feel our security is being threatened ... I see that systemic problems are enabling a mass of people to feel abandoned and failed by the system ... There are huge challenges here, which we need to be willing to face. We have seen Indigenous people on a global basis, get the “short end of the stick”, which is an expression of a way of life that doesn’t work. Indigenous people around the world have “smelled a rat” from the beginning. They didn’t trust the way of life being offered to them. They are concerned about seven generations, which the current system doesn’t recognize. How do we resolve internal problems in a community, when rates of impoverishment are increasing rapidly? Unless the real issues are revealed, nothing will change (Think Tank participant).

Some historical and present-day realities impact people's perceptions of Aboriginal people in Canada, and this ranges from reflexive understanding to wilful, violent ignorance. Ideas were exchanged during the think tank that explored whether non-Aboriginal Canadians are willing to listen and to try to understand Aboriginal peoples' experiences. Some of the challenges here are tied to racism, general and systemic, and acts and attitudes that dehumanize Aboriginal people and place Aboriginal people's experiences in a static past that has no implication to the present. There is also a general apathy around these issues and a belief that no one can do anything; yet there is comfort, too, in this refusal in that it supports the notion of racism being an act committed by an individual rather than derived from any system:

The refusal to know is comforting: it supports an understanding of racism as an act of individuals and not a system. It creates a barrier allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country's racist past and the extent to which that past lives inside its present deep in the national psyche. The need to deny racism in Canada's past resurfaces again and again in its present (Dion, 2004:58).

In short, there are significant, endemic individual and systemic constraints around the issue of engaging people in reconciliation. There are barriers present but these are not insurmountable. Think tank participants felt the forum provided the opportunity to identify some of these challenges.

There is a need to work towards understanding how the past informs the present and the future. In doing so, Canadians need to be made aware of the history of residential schools in a deliberate and non-threatening way; attaching blame to the issue may lead to people becoming disengaged. It is critical that non-Aboriginal Canadians link this new knowledge to action and move towards building constructive relationships with Aboriginal people in Canada. While participants at the think tank all acknowledged that issues involving residential schools and other Aboriginal issues were complex and often evoked extreme emotions, trauma, and political discourse, they all encouraged increased discussion of the issues.²

² See Appendix 3 for a short list of frequently asked questions, conversation starters, and a brief history of residential schools to assist those willing to initiate these discussions.

... attaching blame to the issue may lead to people becoming disengaged.



St. John's School (Denys Wabasca Building)
Wabasca, Alberta

Courtesy of La Société Historique et Généalogique de Smoky River



Staff and students outside the Red Deer Indian Industrial School
Red Deer, Alberta

United Church of Canada, Victoria University Archives, 93.049P/846N

EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The history that has been taught within Canada's education curriculum has mainly been taught through non-Aboriginal perspectives. This has led to biases due to misconceptions, misperceptions, and misunderstandings regarding the history, cultures, and beliefs of Aboriginal people. In order for reconciliation to be achieved, Aboriginal oral histories and legal traditions need to be recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge to be shared and respected.

Aboriginal context must be provided but not just as a mere performance of respect—tokenism; rather, it should be seen as providing the foundational principles of a reconciliation framework (Regan, 2007).

Survivors need to be included in all levels of discussion – and related activities – about curriculum improvement and development, the types of stories that are told and to whom, and how people will be educated about residential school issues. They are the experts. The best way to make people care is for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people to tell their stories in person. Every school should be involved, from elementary to secondary to colleges and universities. This will take time to develop and implement and should be a part of a long-term educational strategy.

In Canada, lessons about Aboriginal peoples are often taught only in elementary schools and the subject is usually limited in scope. The message this sends is that “anything Aboriginal is for children” (Think Tank participants). There has been some progress, though. In Alberta, Aboriginal issues are taught within social sciences and other subjects including math and science. In Saskatchewan, “we are all treaty people,” and individual and community responsibilities associated with upholding a treaty are taught in schools (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, n.d.). This is a good starting point to develop relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The executive summary of *Statement of Treaty Issues: Treaties as a Bridge to the Future* states:

The first year of discussions at the Exploratory Treaty Table in Saskatchewan resulted in the discovery of substantial common ground on understanding the treaty relationship,

Aboriginal
context must be
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just as a mere
performance of
respect...

*When the present
does not recognize the
wrongs of the past,
the future takes its
revenge.*

*Her Excellency the Right
Honourable Michaëlle Jean
“Witnessing the Future”
Ceremony
Rideau Hall
15 October 2009*

on the policy implications of building upon the treaty relationship, and on the mutual benefits of doing so for Canada, Saskatchewan and Treaty First Nations. Everyone in Saskatchewan (and, indeed, in Canada as a whole) is a beneficiary of the prairie treaties (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 1998:8).

The focus should not be solely on the issue of residential schools but instead should provide teachers, parents, and students with curricula that includes and reflects Aboriginal values, content, and the issues that are affecting Aboriginal people today. The curriculum might also include a broader discussion of topics such as reconciliation, reparation, and human rights as they apply to other sectors of Canadian society and to other countries. A variety of resources is more likely to engage students. Making connections with local Aboriginal communities and inviting Elders and Survivors into the classroom will also facilitate experiential learning.

Teachers require support in terms of leading discussions on the difficult topics of colonialism and racism. Lesson plans and curriculum should be developed and made easily available for established educators and new teachers; further, new teachers should have been exposed to these issues and the ways one might address them in teacher's colleges. More research is required about what products will work best for students to initiate healthy discussions and the best methods for teachers to educate students on this sensitive issue. The teacher should encourage exploration of the issue so that the discussion promotes understanding and is not simply an exchange of intolerant ideas. Research about the impacts of residential schools should be fostered at universities in all disciplines.

AUDIENCE

Trying to engage the entire Canadian population is too great a challenge, and this should not be the focus of reconciliation efforts; rather, as one think tank participant noted, we should focus on “moving the congregation into the choir” or engaging those who are already interested, even if only in marginal ways. Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world, and any national engagement strategy needs to identify specific groups and craft messages that are relevant to each group.

As cited above, Environics reported that just over one-third of Canadians are familiar with the issue of Native people and residential schools, which is a somewhat lower level of familiarity than with Aboriginal issues in general. More specifically, the survey identifies that awareness of Aboriginal issues generally and of issues related to Indian residential schools tends to increase with age and is generally higher among better educated Canadians. This identifies a need to raise the awareness of these issues among the youth sector—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (Environics, 2008).

The survey reveals that there is a higher awareness of Aboriginal issues, including those related to Indian residential schools, among people with Protestant (or other non-Catholic) religious affiliations and those with no religious affiliation than among Catholics. Those who attend services regularly have a higher awareness of Aboriginal issues than do those who do not attend services regularly. Since the Ecumenical community already has a high degree of awareness, they should be encouraged to continue to educate their congregations about residential schools, and they could also host events for non-Aboriginal people to raise awareness.

While Canada is diverse, many people do have issues in common. Can we work with other communities or groups who have suffered injustice? Can we engage new Canadians who may have had experiences similar to Aboriginal people? Will new Canadians be in a better position to learn about residential school issues during their citizenship initiation? It may be helpful for people to learn about Canadian history before they are influenced by commonly held misconceptions and negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people.

*The youth is a huge component. They need to get involved in the TRC and need to be educated at an early age.
(Think Tank participant)*

*Whenever we talk
about engagement
in Canada, we hear
about 'mainstream.'
If we want to engage
Canadians in a
broad sense, we're
setting ourselves up
for failure. We should
consider focusing
instead on 'who.'
(Think Tank
participant)*

Reconciliation is a Canadian issue but we can learn from and ally with those groups who may have also experienced injustice(s) and/or violence at the hands of the state like the Japanese, Germans, Italians, Cambodians, Rwandans, Ukrainians, and others. Unexpected alliances are powerful and it is important to create allegiances with other groups working on social justice issues; we can learn from activists working on environmental issues, anti-violence campaigns, and anti-racist issues and then build connections with these grassroots organizations as we work toward reconciliation.

TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA

Efforts around engagement need to be collaborative and applied by dedicated human resources in order to effectively implement engagement strategies. Online resources need to be developed to debunk myths and challenge assumptions. Unfiltered reactions regarding specific events should be captured in order to prompt conversation. However, direct contact with former students has been and will continue to be an important strategy to engage Canadians. In developing strategies to widen the outreach, it is important to remember that many remote and northern communities do not have the same experience with Internet access or computers so it is crucial to provide other ways to directly listen to and engage with Survivors.

According to the Environics survey, Canadians generally are most likely to cite mass media when asked how they heard about Indian residential schools, with half (50%) mentioning the newspaper and an equal proportion (49%) mentioning television. Radio and word-of-mouth are each mentioned by one in five (20%). Aboriginal people are much more likely to mention word-of-mouth as their source of information about Indian residential schools than are Canadians generally. These results emphasize the importance of developing an inclusive engagement strategy that utilizes a mix of traditional and newer media in order to reach all Canadians. Facilitated, reconciliation-themed gatherings that include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants are an effective way to start the dialogue. The 1000 Conversations initiative is an effort by the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation (a department of the Native Counselling Services of Alberta) and the Legacy of Hope Foundation, supported by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to encourage Canadians to talk about reconciliation. Community centres, bookstores, schools, and churches are readily available venues for such activities.

The media needs to be viewed as both traditional mass media (print, network and cable television, radio, video, film) and “new media” (internet networks, interactive websites, blogs and social media tools such as Facebook and YouTube) each with unique audience attributes. Popular music (rap, rock, country) should be considered since it is so interwoven with these various media forms. Celebrity spokespeople can

Some of the more successful activities that have taken place are when the First Nations Chief and Council Leadership may invite an MP to the community and do a tour and sit down for a meal and have a conversation about some of the issues people face.

(Think Tank participant)

Simple messages work best.

bring valuable exposure to the subject of reconciliation and can target specific demographics.

Many people who would not participate in public engagement exercises may take the time to watch or listen to media coverage or to visit a website on Indian residential schools. Media presentations showing dramatic stories and images about former students lead to a better understanding of the issues Aboriginal people face and, thus, have a greater impact. If there is too much nuance in the messages around reconciliation and residential schools, it takes longer for the message to get across; simple messages work best. A personal story will resonate more directly and honestly with an audience than will numbers and statistics.

Journalists report on action, less on ideas, so activities and gatherings are a good way to draw media attention. The media love the story of someone who has experienced obstacles and triumphed over them. Survivor success stories about how they have been able, through healing, to move ahead in their lives, need to be told. Building these stories at the community level is an effective tactic.

Distributing a press release can help generate interest with local media, and this interest may build with the potential for the story to be picked by a major news outlet prompting additional coverage.

If Survivors become educators and tell their stories, there should be mechanisms to ensure that if the coverage is not positive or is hurtful that neither the story-teller nor the audience are traumatized. Similarly, at community gatherings where both abuse victims and perpetrators may be present, there should be resources in place to ensure the safety of all involved. If a certain media outlet's take on the story is not favourable initially, it may still get people talking, and more coverage may follow; this should be considered as both a challenge and an opportunity, if possible.

Aboriginal people need to develop a trusting relationship with the mainstream media who, in turn, need to explore Aboriginal issues more thoroughly; this means that reporters should truly understand the issues at hand before reporting, rather than cobbling stories together from archives and previous efforts by that outlet, and this will likely lead to

issues being viewed in a more “positive light.” Those who distrust the media complain about its reliance on “hooks,” “pegs” and the old “what bleeds must lead” and the resulting negative stories. In one community, a committee met with the editorial boards of the local newspapers and the result was that the media would make an effort to print more positive news stories about Aboriginal people. Building a relationship with the media is important but the initiative must come from the community level so that the effects can expand outwards. If the TRC “uses” the media wisely it can help in the healing process as well as in moving forward strategically and politically.

A personal story
will resonate
more directly and
honestly with an
audience than
will numbers and
statistics.



Legacy of Hope Foundation display presented at Parliament (West Block)
on the day of Canada's apology to Indian residential school Survivors
11 June 2008

Courtesy of Legacy of Hope Foundation

EMOTIONAL ISSUES AND HISTORIC TRAUMA

Reconciliation is a unique and sensitive set of issues due to the combination of denial and sense of shame that have existed around residential schools. Survivors can have all kinds of reactions, including intense anger and great sorrow, and there are other people who have reached out to help others with their experiences. The challenge in mobilizing a whole population with very little knowledge of this history and how it has affected Aboriginal people today is a daunting task. The issue is so divisive even among Survivors. There is a delicate balance required in creating an atmosphere of involvement rather than apathy.

There was much discussion during the think tank about how to listen and to speak. How will these stories be heard and responded to by Canadians in general? What listeners hear will often be at odds with what is being related, and thus will influence what they will do with the information. Providing the opportunity to speak the truth is only half the challenge. Effective ways need to be found for people to deal with the questions and assumptions that frame what is heard in Survivor stories and to challenge Canadians to listen in new ways. For some people, it is talking to friends and family about this history; for others, it may be getting to know First Nations neighbours, engaging in dialogue as a way to establish trust and build relationships. It is important for people to feel empowered to make concrete changes, however small they might seem.

There was some concern that responses of Canadians to these stories may not serve the purpose of reconciliation defined in the terms of the Commission as the “rebuilding and renewing of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.” The notion of what it means to listen and respond to the memories of residential school Survivors is something that needs attention.

When many Canadians hear the history and legacy of residential schools, especially as told directly by Survivors, they go into denial, become paralyzed by guilt or anger, or even become apathetic. How do we promote the idea of listening to Survivors’ stories and recognizing

*There is tremendous value in First Nations and Inuit worldviews and Canadians (and the world) have much to learn and benefit from this knowledge. Reconciliation is an opportunity to convey this message and to make widely known the inherent strengths and attributes of First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures.
(Think Tank participant)*

The social movement that can stem from this current TRC in Canada must have a “spirit and intent” that is ongoing – reconciliation is an effort that will take many years.

them as powerful teaching moments that can spark deep transformative change in each other and the rest of Canadian society?

After the TRC in South Africa, those who told their story publicly found that it had transformed their lives well beyond the mandate of the Commission. This long-term “confrontation with the human condition” (Bundy, 2000:9) can affect others as well. The TRC in South Africa had this “emotional, cultural and symbolic power, and, above all, to the potency and intensity of the testimony it elicited, especially in the public hearings. ... [this testimony] is a confrontation with the human condition; it requires each of us to come to terms with the worst and best in our fellow citizens” (Bundy, 2000:9). During the South African truth and reconciliation process, those who shared their personal stories felt re-traumatized by recalling their experiences. Support was needed for those who chose to share difficult stories. There are some lessons that the South African experience can offer:

At the same time the TRC process illustrates the danger of establishing a hierarchy of victimhood ... Advocates of the TRC praise involvement of broad sectors of society in providing information. The communal experience of public hearings, of being heard and being officially recognized as victims, is said to be as important for the healing of trauma as the testimony itself. Unfortunately, this broad involvement also raises false expectations. In South Africa, many communities are disappointed that follow up did not take place ... ‘We have stimulated hopes and then abandoned the people,’ explains one Commissioner self-critically (Adam and Adam, 2000:41).

A number of truth commissions (such as those in East Timor, Guatemala, and Argentina) have ongoing activities to reform and engage in civil society and human rights issues on a national scale long after the close of their truth commissions. Participants at the think tank encouraged this approach.

The social movement that can stem from this current TRC in Canada must have a “spirit and intent” that is ongoing – reconciliation is an effort that will take many years. This is a long-term effort that can be built from some initial short-term actions.

*I was recently able to observe a welcoming gathering in Winnipeg where new immigrants were welcomed to the country. It helped people gain a history about Canada before being influenced by the mainstream. We need to look at youth, immigrants, and other segments of Canadians, rather than a blanket approach.
(Think Tank participant)*



Cree students at Lac la Ronge Mission School
La Ronge, Saskatchewan
Photographer: Bud Glunz, National Film Board of Canada
Library and Archives Canada, PA-134110

SENSITIVE MESSAGES

The issue of blame requires caution. When we start having discussions with people who do not agree with us because they think their way of life is better, difficult conversations can occur. Pointing out ignorance is not exactly endearing, but the status quo is not at all acceptable. Perhaps Canadians have to become upset or angry before they will begin to contemplate change and take responsibility for their ideas, even though not everyone will be pleased and controversy cannot be avoided; however, there must be caution that we do not feed into racism. There is a real need to think through how we may have difficult conversations. Some Survivors still have a sense of shame or blame themselves for wrongs done to them by an individual or individuals. There is also still a lot of shame about having attended residential school and/or having experienced different forms of abuse or trauma while at school.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that bystander exhaustion does not take place so that people do not tune out or become apathetic. This is a real dilemma where powerful or emotionally charged experiences can overstimulate or turn off the interest of the general public. Can emotional reactions engender transformation?

People need to hear the hard truths. There is a need to hear the truth from government, churches, and other perpetrators. This will require care and caution; you do not want to focus too much on the perpetrators because this may lead to a dismissal of the problem. The TRC is an opportunity for people to accept responsibility in a way that is grounded in reality.

*When discussing residential schools and engaging Canadians, there is a hypersensitivity to blame, and the first response is often “I wasn’t part of it” or “Why are you blaming me for what’s happened?” One response to “I’m not responsible for what happened 50 to 100 years ago” is “You’re responsible for today,” since this was not a short blip in history.
(Think Tank participant)*



Shingwauk Indian Residential School reunion
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

Photographer: Kanatiio, 2004

FRAMING TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION: STRENGTHS-BASED MESSAGING

The primary parties—the Survivors, the churches, and the government—need to build a relationship of trust with each other because if the TRC is not inclusive, the rest of Canada will not be inspired to follow. This is a complex story and people should be mindful of the sensitivities and should create safe spaces for people to speak and to witness. Stories need to be framed in such a way as to do no harm; this is not to say we should be uncritical, but that when the truth is told, it should not cause further harm. An approach that is too negative may result in unhealthy stigma and may not be conducive to healing or reconciliation processes.

Messages around residential schools and reconciliation should reflect Canadian values of tolerance, respect, and diversity. Messages should be framed to reflect Aboriginal oral histories, cultures, and legal traditions. This will help both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to connect and be receptive to the issue. Stories of the strengths and resiliency of Aboriginal people are positive messages—healing and overcoming adversity are powerful frames to which every person can relate. Helping Canadians empathize by encouraging them to search back through their own family's history may be a useful approach for making this issue relevant to the broader Canadian public. Another message could be about recognition without assimilation. More and more Aboriginal people are feeling pressure to conform to mainstream society and that, in turn, is causing conflict.

Similar to environmental problems, the scope of the challenges related to reconciliation and residential schools leaves some feeling that the problem cannot be fixed, and this can lead to hopelessness. How can we support cross-cultural learning? How can we empower individuals to lead these conversations in their own communities?

The goal of reconciliation is to reach a time when we can all say, “I learned that reconciliation is not a goal but a place of encounter where all participants gather the courage to face our shared history honestly without minimizing the very real damage that has been done, even as we learn new decolonizing ways of working together that shift power and perceptions” (Regan, 2007:42).

This is a complex story and people should be mindful of the sensitivities and should create safe spaces for people to speak and to witness.



First year, school girls at All Saints School in Aklavik
Fleming, NWT Archives, N-1979-050:0101

(This photo can be found in the Legacy of Hope Foundation's
"We were so far away...": The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools exhibit)

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CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT
AND RECONCILIATION

A Think Tank

Hosted by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and
The Legacy of Hope Foundation
Friday, February 20, 2009 and Saturday, February 21, 2009
The Delta Ottawa, Ottawa ON

AGENDA

Friday, February 20

- 5:30 – 6:30: Welcome Reception – Victoria Room, Delta Hotel
- 6:30: Opening Prayer with Elder Irene Lindsay
- 6:45 – 8:30: Dinner with Keynote Address by Shelagh Rogers
- 8:30 – 10:00: Exhibit Tour and Q&A:
“We Were So Far Away...”: The Inuit Experience of Residential Schools
- ✦ Library and Archives Canada,
395 Wellington Street;
 - ✦ One block north of the Delta

Saturday, February 21

- 8:00: Breakfast (provided) – Victoria Room
- 8:45: Opening Prayer and Welcoming Remarks
- 9:00: *Framing the Discussion*: Presentation and Q&A:
- ✦ Aboriginal Healing Foundation
 - ✦ Legacy of Hope Foundation
 - ✦ Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Survivor Perspectives on Healing and Reconciliation*:
- ✦ Chief Robert Joseph
 - ✦ Maggie Hodgson

10:00: Health Break

10:15: Discussion Groups:
*Exploring Themes within Engagement in Canadian
Contexts*

12:00: Lunch (provided)

12:45: Plenary Discussion: Group Feedback and Discussion

1:30: *Engaging Canadians in Aboriginal Issues:*
+ Elijah Harper

1:45: Discussion Groups:
*Engagement through Aboriginal- and Reconciliation-
specific Lenses*

2:45: Health Break

3:00: Plenary Discussion: Group Feedback and Discussion

4:30: Closing Remarks and Prayer

5:00: Adjourn

LIST OF PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATIONS

Along with participating residential school Survivors and First Nations youth, participants represented the following organizations and/or area(s) of expertise:

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Healing Our Spirit Worldwide

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Secretariat

Aboriginal Healing Foundation

Ascentum (Mental Health Commission of Canada)

Assembly of First Nations

Canadian Museum for Human Rights

David Suzuki Foundation

Free the Children

Government of Ontario

Health Canada

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Justice Canada

Legacy of Hope Foundation

Mental Health Commission Canada

Native Women's Association of Canada

United Church

Scholars from Algoma University, Carleton University, Kingston University, Queen's University, and University of Toronto

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*

Q. What if I don't have much knowledge about residential schools?

A. Anyone who wants to begin a conversation can get more information from the national campaign "1000 Conversations Across Canada on Reconciliation." They can provide a package to help you get started. This package contains: background information on the history and legacy of residential schools, milestones in Canada's healing and reconciliation movement; conversation starters; and a seven-minute DVD containing the stories of two residential school Survivors.

Q. How do I get this information package?

A. You can contact 1000conversations.ca and complete the request for the information package or you can call the Legacy of Hope Foundation at 613-237-4806 or 877-553-7177, and they will send an information package to your home or work.

Q. Where is an appropriate place to have a conversation?

A. Anywhere. At work, a dinner party at your home, over coffee, at your church, in your school, in your community club, or in any space where you talk with your friends, family, and colleagues.

Q. Do I need to stick to or only use the conversation starters for my conversation?

A. No, your conversation can be focused on reconciliation and residential schools in any way that you want. Conversation starters are provided for those seeking assistance in guiding their conversation.

* The questions provided above have been excerpted or adapted from the 1000 Conversations Across Canada on Reconciliation FAQs.

CONVERSATION STARTERS*

Need help starting your conversation? Here are some conversation starters:

- After reading the background document and viewing the seven-minute DVD, share your thoughts on residential schools. Talk about what you would have missed if you were taken from your home as a child and placed in institutions like a residential school. What would be some of the effects? How would you heal?
- Offer your perspectives on reconciliation.
 - ✦ What does reconciliation mean to you?
 - ✦ How do we reconcile with our past? With each other? With other communities?
 - ✦ Are there other examples of reconciliation that would be helpful when thinking about the Canadian situation?
- Is an apology an important part of healing and reconciliation?
- What can be done to increase public understanding of and sensitivity to the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal peoples, their families, and their communities?
- What elements are essential to renewing or building a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada?
- How will we know when reconciliation has taken place in Canada?
- What can we do to educate others about this history and engage them in the reconciliation process?
- The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been working for eleven years to address the healing needs of Survivors and their families from the abuses that occurred in residential schools. How can Canadians participate in the healing movement across the country?

- If possible and appropriate, engage a Survivor in your conversation. They may not want to engage in a conversation, as it will depend on whether or not they are on a healing journey to address residential school issues. Ask them to share their residential school experience with you and talk together about what reconciliation means.
- If you live in a community still healing from the effects of residential schools, what can your community do to help itself heal? What does your community need for reconciliation?
- Read the commemoration section of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca). Discuss how Survivors in your community can be commemorated? Engage Survivors and ask them what would be appropriate.
- Despite the fact that there are a number of resources about residential schools available to schools across the country, many Canadians are still unaware of this part of their history. What can be done to assist communities, school boards, and provincial and territorial governments to include residential schools as part of their curriculum?

Your conversation ideas can be posted on the **1000 Conversations Across Canada on Reconciliation** website. Send them to admin@1000conversations.ca

* The conversation starters provided above have been excerpted or adapted from the 1000 Conversations Across Canada on Reconciliation “Need help starting your conversation?”

BRIEF HISTORY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS*

The origins of the residential school system predate Confederation and in part grew out of Canada's missionary experience with various religious organizations.

The Federal Government began to play a role in the development and administration of this school system as early as 1874, mainly to meet its obligation, under the *Indian Act*, to provide an education to Aboriginal people, as well as to assist with their integration into the broader Canadian society.

The term "residential school" generally refers to a variety of institutions which have existed over time, including: industrial schools, boarding schools, student residences, hostels, billets, and residential schools. These schools were located in every province and territory, except New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. At any one time, there were no more than 100 such schools in operation. The federal government currently recognizes that 132 federally supported residential schools existed across Canada. This number does not recognize those residential schools that were administered by provincial/territorial governments and churches. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 children attended these schools over the years in which they were in operation.

Residential schools officially operated in Canada from 1892 to 1969 through funding arrangements between the Government of Canada and the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England (or Anglican Church), the Methodist (or United) Church, and the Presbyterian Church. On April 1, 1969, the Government assumed full responsibility for the school system. Most residential schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s, with only seven remaining open through the 1980s. The last federally run residential school in Canada closed in Saskatchewan in 1996.

It is estimated that there are approximately 80,000 residential school Survivors alive today.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes, often forcibly removed and separated from their families by long distances. Others who attended residential schools near their communities were often prohibited from seeing their families outside of occasional permitted visits. Students were forbidden to speak their language or practice their culture, and were often punished for doing so. Many students were forced to do manual labour and fed poor quality food. Many students received a sub-standard education. As late as 1950, according to a study by the Department of Indian Affairs, over 40 per cent of the teaching staff had no professional training.

In recent years, individuals have come forward with personal and painful stories of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. Today, while it is not uncommon to hear some former students speak about their positive experiences in these institutions, their stories are overshadowed by disclosures of abuse, criminal convictions of perpetrators, and the findings of various studies such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that tell of the tragic legacy that the residential school system has left with many former students. They, and their communities, continue to deal with issues such as physical and sexual abuse, family violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL IMPACTS

The impacts of the residential schools have been felt in every segment of Aboriginal societies.

Communities suffered social, economic, and political disintegration. Languages were attacked and continue to be threatened. Families were wrenched apart. The lives of individual students were devastated. Many of those who went through the schools were denied any opportunity to develop parenting skills and lost the ability to pass these skills on to their own children. They struggled with the destruction of their identities as Aboriginal people, the loss of personal liberty and privacy, and memories of abuse, trauma, poverty, isolation, and neglect.

Thousands of former students have come forward to reveal that physical, emotional, and sexual abuse were rampant in the school system and that little was done to stop it, to punish the abusers, or to improve conditions. Many passed the abuse they suffered on to their children, thereby perpetuating the cycle of abuse and dysfunction arising from the residential school system.

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

After years of resistance, protest, and activism on the part of many Aboriginal people and others, the first major steps towards healing began. The churches involved in running the schools publicly apologized. The first to apologize was the United Church of Canada in 1986. Other apologies and statements followed – by the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (Roman Catholic) in 1991, the Anglican Church in 1993, and the Presbyterian Church in 1994.

Around this same time, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was examining the issue of residential schools as part of its larger mandate. In 1996, RCAP released its final report, which included a section outlining research and findings on residential schools and contained recommendations specific to residential schools.

In 1997, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement expressing their regret for the pain and suffering that many Aboriginal people experienced in the residential school system. Pope John Paul II expressed similar regrets in the year 2000.

The creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) in 1998 heralded a period of attempts to find solutions to the trauma that still affects Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities as a result of the residential school legacy of physical and sexual abuse as well as the assaults on cultures and languages. Hundreds of healing initiatives and projects have been funded through the AHF, and many other independent programs and initiatives have been created throughout Canada to heed the healing objective.

In 2007, the Government of Canada implemented the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*. This agreement included: a common experience payment to all former students of federally administered residential schools; an independent assessment process to address compensation for physical and sexual abuse; the establishment of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission; funding for healing initiatives; and a separate fund for commemoration projects.

The following year, the Government of Canada announced its formal apology to Survivors of Indian residential schools, along with apologies from all federal political parties. Pope Benedict XVI expressed his sorrow in 2009.

The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008. It is an official, independent body with a five-year mandate to provide former students and anyone else affected by the Indian residential school system with an opportunity to share, through statement-taking or truth-sharing, their individual experiences in a safe and culturally appropriate manner. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis former Indian residential school students, their families, communities, the churches, former school employees, government, and other Canadians are encouraged to participate. The TRC will research and examine the conditions that gave rise to the Indian residential school legacy and will be an opportunity for people to tell their stories about a significant part of Canadian history that is still unknown to most Canadians. The TRC hopes to guide and inspire First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and all Canadians in a process of truth and healing that will lead toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

* The information above has been excerpted or adapted from 1000 Conversations Across Canada on Reconciliation and Aboriginal Healing Foundation publications.

PRIME MINISTER HARPER
OFFERS FULL APOLOGY ON BEHALF OF CANADIANS
FOR THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SYSTEM

[On 11 June 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered a full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system. Below is the text of his speech delivered in the House of Commons.]

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child". Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal Peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to

protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal Peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

Nous le regrettons

We are sorry

Nimitataynan

Niminchinowesamin

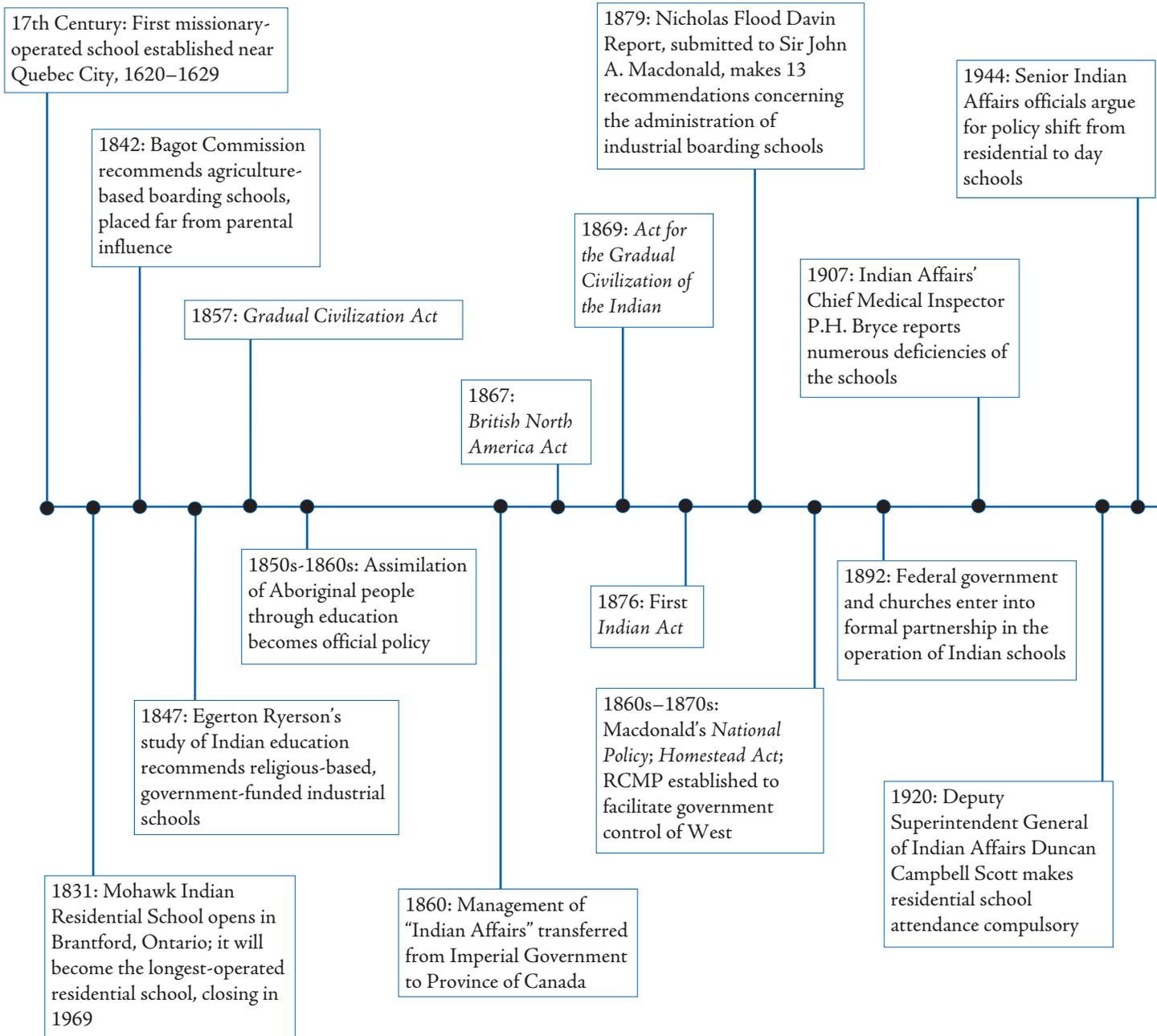
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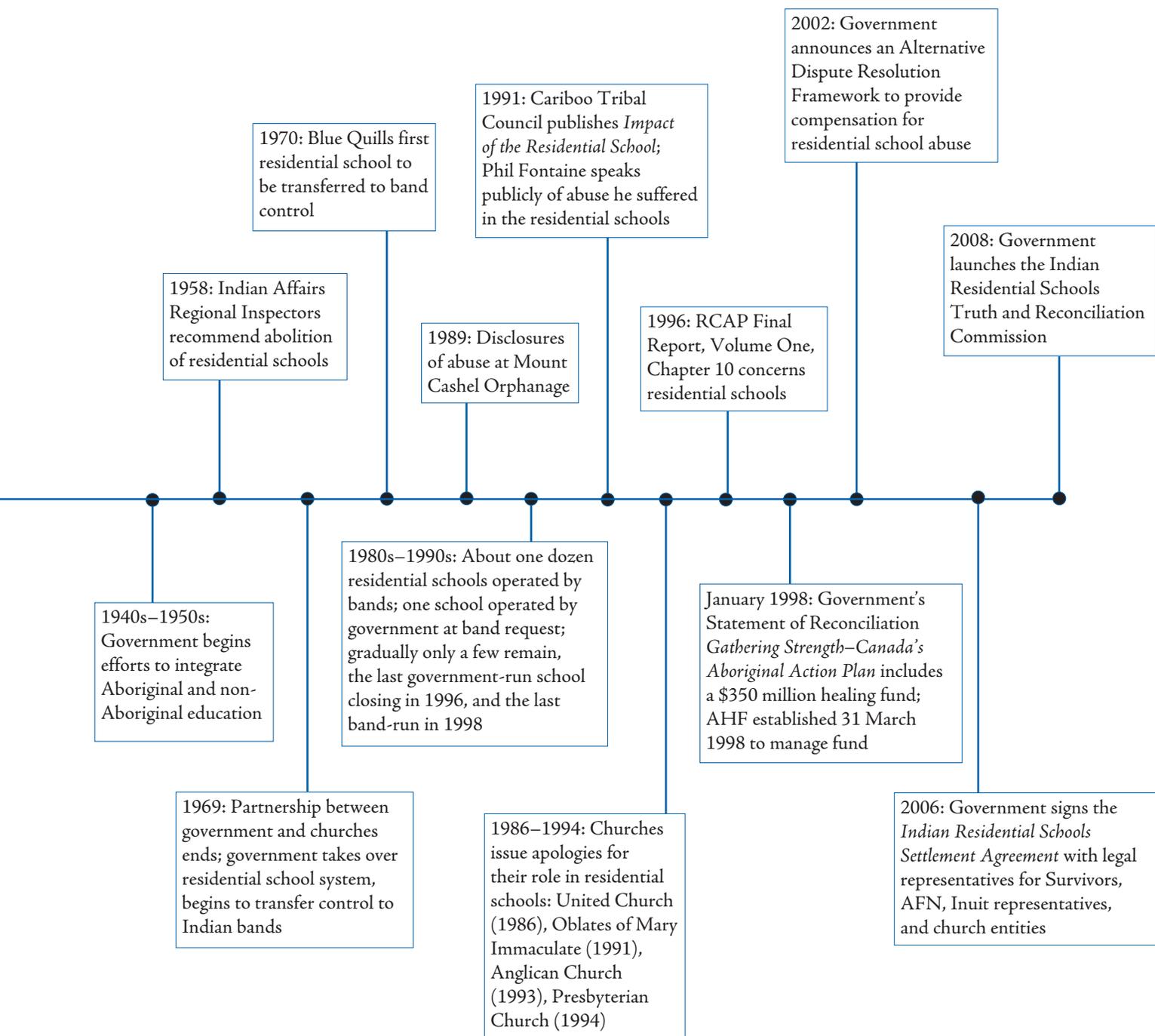
In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership.

A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

Retrieved 24 November 2008 from: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=2149>

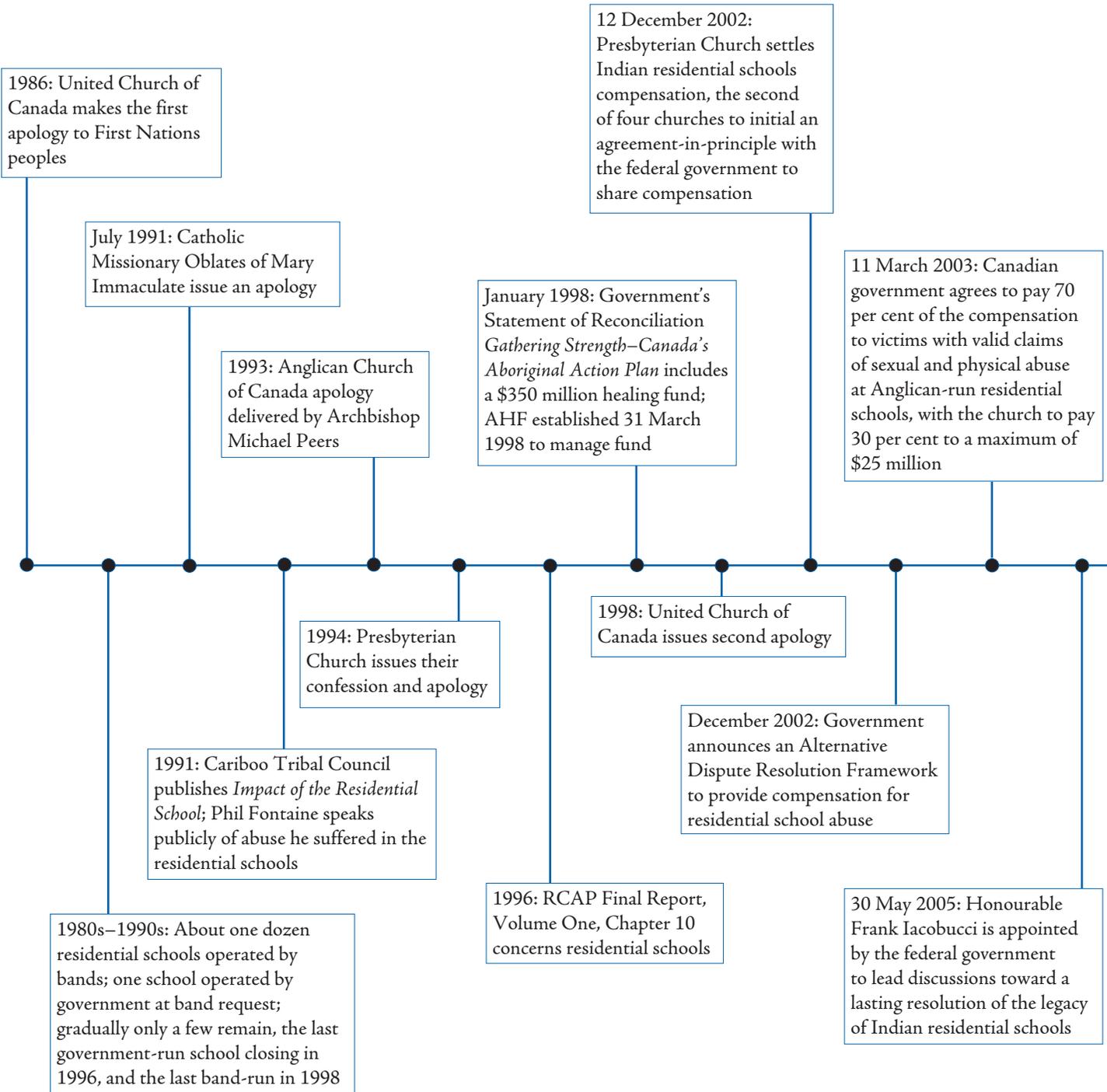
A CONDENSED TIMELINE OF EVENTS

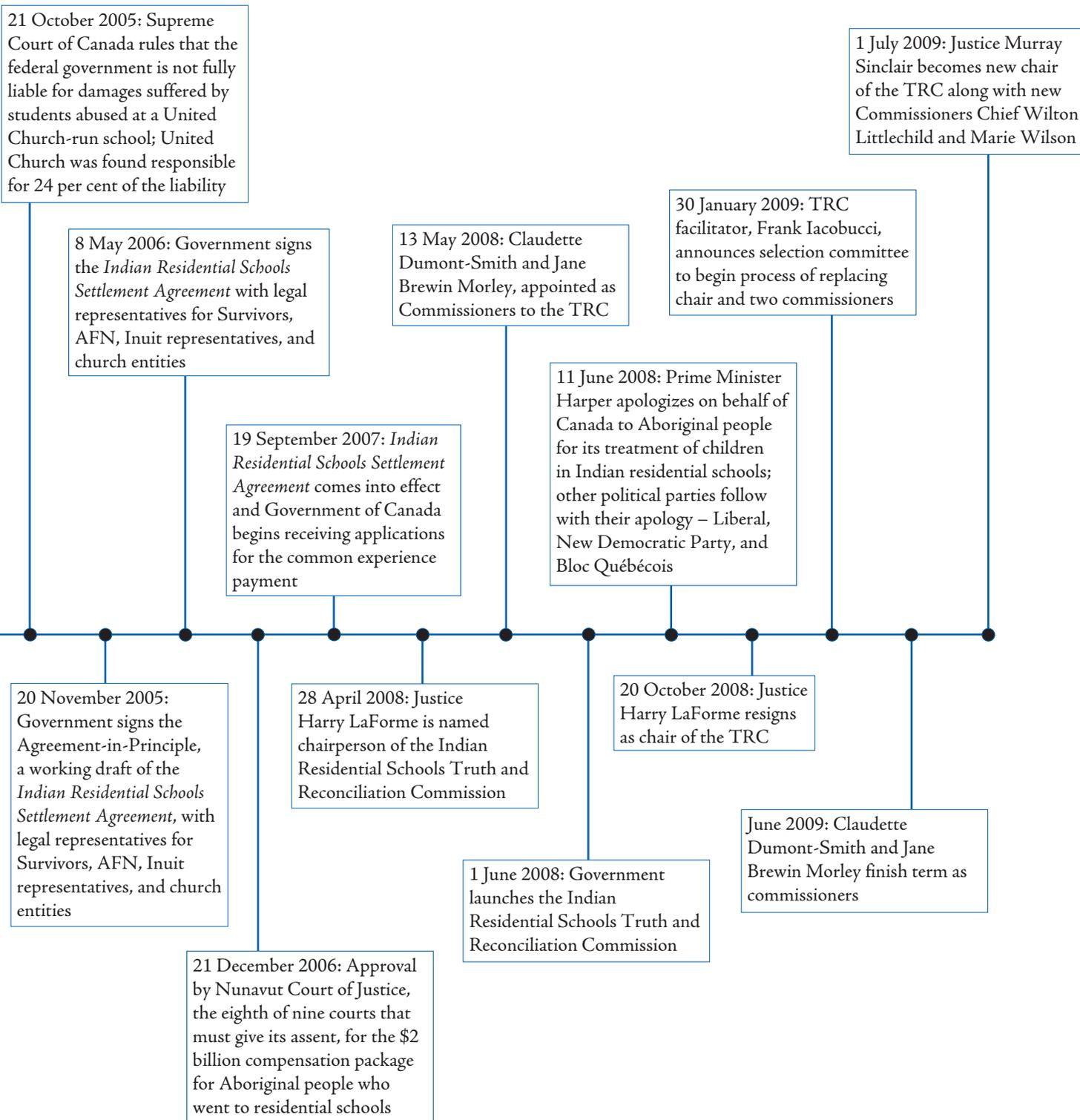




APOLOGY AND RECONCILIATION

A TIMELINE OF EVENTS





RECONCILIATION JOURNEY

*Before
In this nation of rivers
The canoe
A gift from The Land
Brought people side by side;
Aboriginal, non-aboriginal
In the same boat
Pulling together
From sea to sea*

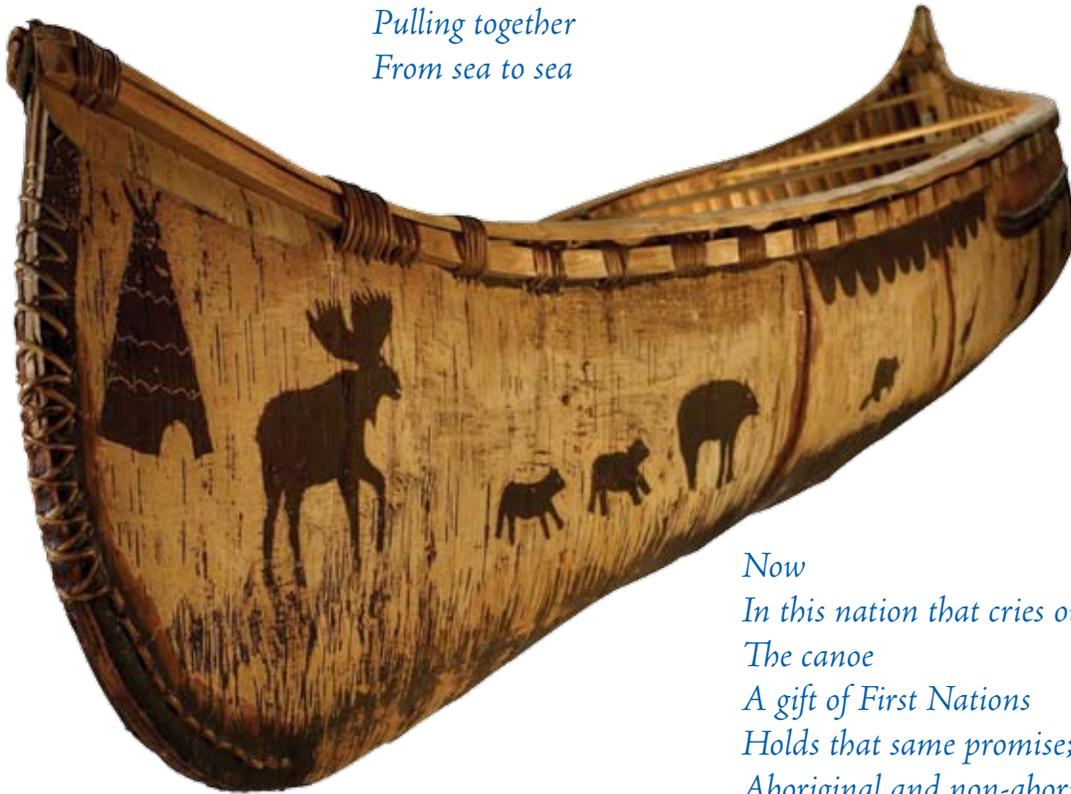


Photo: *Untitled*

Description: an Algonquin-style
birchbark canoe built c. 1980
by William and Mary Commanda
of Kitigan Zibi, Quebec

Photographer: Michael Cullen

Courtesy of: The Canadian Canoe Museum

*Now
In this nation that cries out for healing
The canoe
A gift of First Nations
Holds that same promise;
Aboriginal and non-aboriginal
In the same boat
Pulling together
From sea to unity*

*Then
In a nation renewed
The canoe
We build together
Will carry our past; and remind us
As Canadians
That being in the same boat
Pulling together
Opens new horizons*

James Raffan

