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Truth And Reconciliation Commission Report Signals Time For Government To Act

Bruce Cheadle, The Canadian Press CP



OTTAWA — Justice Murray Sinclair says the entire country must join a journey to reconciliation between aboriginals and non-aboriginals — and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised to join that journey.

The head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Tuesday wound up a six-year odyssey that chronicled decades of suffering and tragedy in thousands of pages of testimony from victims of the residential school system.

He ended it at with a clarion call for action at a formal ceremony marking the delivery of the commission's final report.



Truth and Reconciliation Commission chairman Justice Murray Sinclair. (Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press)

"Change, of course, will not be immediate," he said. "It will take years, perhaps generations, but it is important for Canadians to start somewhere and ultimately to create those tools of reconciliation that will live beyond today."

A survivor in the audience wept as Sinclair spoke of how the commission's work changed his life and those of his two fellow commissioners.

With Trudeau looking on, Sinclair spoke of a country that has hard work ahead.

"Achieving reconciliation ... is like climbing a mountain; we must proceed one step at a time," he said.

"It will not always be easy, there will be storms, there will be obstacles, we will fall down from time to time. But we cannot allow ourselves to be daunted by the task because our goal is a just one and it is also necessary for our children."

The prime minister, in his own speech, recalled the historic apology to Aboriginal Peoples delivered by the Harper government seven years ago.

"Today, we find ourselves on a new path, working together toward a nation-to-nation relationship based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation and partnership," an emotional Trudeau said.

His speech was interrupted four times by standing ovations.



Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau greets Justice Murray Sinclair at the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (Photo: Adrian Wyld/CP)

He said it is time for a renewal of the relationship between indigenous peoples and Canada as a whole.

"The final report provides a way forward for all Canadians," he said. "Building on the formal apologies of seven years ago, it sets us squarely on the path to true reconciliation. The government of Canada is committed to walking that path with indigenous peoples in partnership and in friendship."

Sinclair said the commission's findings make clear that the myriad problems of aboriginal communities are rooted, directly or indirectly, in years of government efforts to "assimilate, acculturate, indoctrinate and destroy."

"When it comes to engineering the lives of indigenous people in this country, governments have shown a disdainful mistrust of indigenous capacity and a breezy belief in their own," he said.

Sinclair also thanked his family, saying they fretted about his health as he worked gruelling hours with the commission.

"In the area of my own health and well-being, I am a reckless fool."

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