



Truth and Reconciliation report brings calls for action, not words

Commission releases 94 recommendations to confront 'cultural genocide' of schools

Chloe Fedio · CBC News · Posted: Jun 02, 2015 11:48 AM ET | Last Updated: June 2, 2015

The CBC's Connie Walker examines the testimony of those who suffered in Canada's residential schools 3:46

Canadians must believe in the need for reconciliation with Aboriginal Peoples to repair the damage caused by residential schools, aboriginal leaders said Tuesday, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its summary report and findings.

Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the commission, called for changes in policies and programs, as well as commemoration through education and memorials, in introducing the commission's summary report and 94 recommendations.

"Words are not enough," Sinclair said, to address the "cultural genocide" of residential schools on aboriginal communities.

- [Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission findings](#)
- [Stephen Harper defends aboriginal affairs record in wake of residential schools report](#)
- [TRC chair urges adoption of UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [More Truth and Reconciliation stories, video and photos](#)

"Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem — it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us."

Aboriginal leaders, church representatives and government and opposition leaders all acknowledged the commission's work is just the beginning, with many agreeing the history and legacy of residential schools should be part of the Canadian education curriculum.

Sinclair said seven generations were denied their identity as they were separated from their language, culture, spiritual traditions and their collective history.

"Survivors were stripped of the ability to answer these questions, but they were also stripped of the love of their families. They were stripped of their self-respect and they were stripped of their identity," he said.



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— Justice Murray Sinclair

The commission's report was released Tuesday after six years of hearings and testimony from more than 6,000 residential school survivors and their loved ones. Sinclair received lengthy standing ovations while speaking to a packed Ottawa ballroom about the recommendations.

Sinclair also called for an annual "State of Aboriginal Peoples" report and action on the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in the child welfare system, as well as aboriginal people, especially youth, in custody.

But during the largest ovation, for the commission's support for a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women, Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt remained seated. The Harper government has consistently refused calls for a national inquiry on the issue.

Commissioners speak eloquently about their experiences over the past 6 years 3:27

"Our recommendations should not be seen as an itemization of a national penance but as an opportunity to embrace a second chance at establishing a relationship of equals, which was intended at the beginning and should have continued throughout," he told the crowd.

- [Legacy of residential schools hits Twitter with #MyReconciliationIncludes](#)

"Our leaders must not fear this onus of reconciliation. The burden is not theirs to bear alone, rather, reconciliation is a process that involves all parties of this new relationship."

Later, during a news conference, Sinclair said the report is meant to "stand the test of time," and is not just for the current government.

'Remember and change'

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, delivered a joint statement with representatives from the Presbyterian, United and Catholic churches, acknowledging the "heartbreaking stories" of young students at schools that were administered by the churches.

"We know and declare that our apologies are not enough," he said. "Those harmed were children, vulnerable, far from their families and their communities. The sexual, physical and emotional abuse they suffered is well-documented, particularly in the work of the TRC."

The summary report released today called on the Pope to issue an official apology, to be delivered in Canada within a year. In 2009, [Pope Benedict XVI expressed "sorrow" for abuse aboriginal students suffered](#) at residential schools run by the Roman Catholic Church.

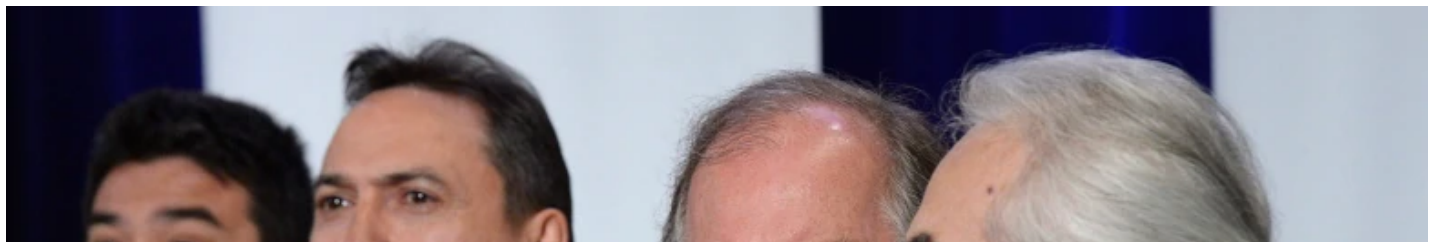
Commissioner Murray Sinclair tells reporters that the Truth and Reconciliation report was written for not just the current government, but future governments who will continue to reconcile Canada's history with Indian Residential Schools. 1:06

Valcourt said reconciliation is not to "forgive and forget, but to remember and change." He said "it's not going to be an easy journey" to arrive at reconciliation, but that the government was committed to continue to work to improve relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people.

"I'm confident that we can build on the important work that's been done and continue to heal as a nation," he said.

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair hailed the report, saying aboriginal affairs touch the future of the economy, the development of resources and the environment.

"Let's recognize the harm that's been done and let's change our attitudes," he told reporters. "We can't let this incredible work not constitute the opportunity to change things for the future."





Former AFN national chief Phil Fontaine, right to left, Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, current AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde and Terry Audla, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, attend the release of the report on Canada's residential school system in Ottawa Tuesday. (Adrian Wylid/Canadian Press)

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau offered "unwavering support" for the report's recommendations.

Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde said that while [Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology](#) to former residential school students in 2008, it's time for the next step.

"It really is an empty, meaningless apology without action," Bellegarde said.

After a meeting with Harper and the minister of aboriginal affairs, Sinclair said in a statement Tuesday that he is still concerned by the "government's resistance to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

Sinclair said the prime minister was "open to listening to some of our concerns and inquired about some of our recommendations" and that the commissioners have offered to meet again once Harper has read the report.

Inuit leader Terry Audla urged the Canadian government to recognize survivors of residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador and the Inuit regions, as well. The [federal government has denied responsibility for those schools](#) that were not directly funded by Ottawa.

Phil Fontaine, a former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations and a residential school survivor, said it's been a "long and painful" journey to arrive at this "historic moment" in

Canadian history.

"This day will help us put that pain behind us," he said. "This day, Canada has come of age."

Must make 'broken country whole again'

In between the commissioners' speeches, videos presented residential school survivors speaking emotionally about what they experienced while in the schools. Many of the survivors broke down while recalling dark, disturbing moments in explicit detail.

The videos also included speeches from aboriginal leaders, former prime ministers Paul Martin and Joe Clark and non-aboriginal people, including schoolchildren, talking about the need to confront the legacy of the residential schools

Commissioner Marie Wilson thanked residential school survivors for their bravery and trust in sharing their experiences.

"And now we must — we must demand that same bravery and trust from all Canadians. Not just government officials, not just elected leaders, but every person in Canada," she said.

"We need reconciliation so that a broken country can become whole again."

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt says that reconciliation of the effects of the Indian Residential Schools system will not mean to 'forgive and forget, but to remember and change.' 3:26

At least 3,200 students never returned home from residential schools — in a third of those cases, their names were not recorded and in half their cause of death was not recorded, she said. Children were buried at schools that often had graveyards but no playgrounds, she said.

"Parents who had their children ripped out of their arms, taken to a distant and unknown place, never to be seen again. Buried in an unmarked grave, long ago forgotten and overgrown. Think of that. Bear that. Imagine that. The reason of death a mystery," she said.

The commission established the National Residential School Student Death Register in an effort to record those names.

She called for changes to fill the gaps in Canadian history classes.

"How frank and truthful are we with Canadian students about the history of residential schools and the role our governments and religious institutions played in its systematic attempt to erase the cultures of aboriginal people?" she said.



Residential school survivors and aboriginal women react as Truth and Reconciliation Commission chair Murray Sinclair speaks at the release of the commission's report Tuesday. (Adrian Wyld/Canadian Press)

Report commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild spoke of his own time in a residential school, and emphasized how the importance of families resonated in the commission's work.

"Families that had been attacked, both individually and collectively, by a policy designed to tear families apart and to remove the spirit of indigenous people. A policy that sought to turn families against each other," he said.

"That did, and continues to, impact aboriginal families and intergenerational survivors. Despite these immense obstacles, our families remained resilient."

Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Marie Wilson says Canadians "cannot unknow what they now know" about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. All Canadians have a responsibility to work on reconciliation, she said. 4:29

With files from Haydn Watters

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