

HEAR OUR VOICE



Report on a National Forum on Reconciliation -
Marking the 20

Introduction

Just over a year ago, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) and its 94 calls to action implored everyone in Canada to confront the legacy of residential schools and undertake sweeping reforms to build understanding and healing and forge a new relationship between Indigenous people and Canadians.

Canada cannot risk getting it wrong this time. Twenty years ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) also released a wealth of information and 440 recommendations at a cost of \$60 million and five years of extensive research, testimony, consultation and deliberation.



Many of the RCAP recommendations are mirrored by the TRC and indeed the TRC Commissioners attest to the foundational importance of the RCAP analysis. Yet the RCAP recommendations were largely ignored at the time, considered too radical and difficult to implement.

With this rare second chance presented by the TRC, it is important to examine the lessons of RCAP - still the most extensive and ethically-based research program aimed at better understanding the historical and lived experience of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples in Canada.

Recognizing the opportunity offered by the TRC report and the work done by RCAP, a group of volunteers comprised of RCAP alumni, representatives of national Indigenous organizations, members of key civil society organization and academics convened in 2015 to consider how to mark the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commission and build momentum going forward from the TRC.

As a result, committed people from major sectors of society in Canada convened at a national forum in Winnipeg in November 2016 to determine how the lessons learned from the previous 20 years can inform the reconciliation process as we build a new

relationship and close the alarming gap in life circumstances between Indigenous people and Canadians.

The conference attracted national Indigenous leaders, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, senior public servants, municipal leaders, leaders of non-profit organizations, TRC and RCAP members, university executives, academics, researchers and, most importantly, youth leaders.

Youth figured prominently in the proceedings, holding their own sessions and actively engaging in the plenaries. The forum's recommendations are intended to improve the prospects of this generation and those who follow.

Participants engaged in three days of activities ranging from keynote addresses and panels to honouring ceremonies and breakout sessions. One of the highlights was an announcement by Library and Archives Canada that the complete information legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples would be available on its website.

Along with continuing dialogue, a number of lasting resources have emerged from the forum. These include the conference web pages, with edited videos of the plenaries, which will be transferred to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website. Steps are being taken as well to prepare an edited book and e-book of conference papers.

This document provides an overview of the key messages from the RCAP national forum. It

serves as a practical guide to moving forward now - capturing the momentum for change that has been building since RCAP and making its vision, and that of the TRC, a reality. It will discuss top priorities for policy change and principles for implementation before coming to conclusions about the path forward in an effort to inform governments, policy-makers and civil society organizations.

The overarching conclusion from the forum is that we have lost a generation since RCAP and we must be determined not to lose this one. Some of the proceedings that led to this message, and some of the ideas for positive change that emerged, may not be immediately comfortable for all. Nonetheless, forum participants worked from a wide and deep background of observation and direct experience. Their goal is to bring about a new relationship between First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples and Canada that makes this land better for everyone.

If you are in a position to make a difference, whether as a politician, educator, community worker or student, this report will, hopefully, help you to address these important issues. Whatever sphere of influence is available to you - the time to act is now.

OUR STARTING POINT:

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples urged Canadians to begin a national process of reconciliation that would set the country on a bold new path, fundamentally changing the foundation of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

It gave an authoritative voice to a new interpretation of Canadian history and asked a fundamental question: What is the necessary foundation to permit the just completion of Confederation?

RCAP set out a vision and an ambitious, detailed plan. But the underlying theme was consistent – achieving self-determination and self-reliance for Indigenous peoples to better their lives and improve relationships within Canada was the foundation of a new approach.

"If one theme dominates," said the report, "it is that Aboriginal peoples must have room to exercise their autonomy and structure their own solutions." *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 5, Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment*

RCAP noted that Indigenous sovereignty is recognized and given

with exercising the constitutional right of self-government.

Fifty-four of RCAP's 440 recommendations deal with governance alone – matters of the Constitution and parliament, legal frameworks, jurisdictional arrangements, machinery of government,

And while few were implemented, there is no doubt that RCAP changed the conversation. It was part of the foundation and impetus for change that has continued to grow. While governments may have been reluctant to embrace the full range of the RCAP recommendations, Indigenous governments, communities and organizations have built upon them – leading to

the original vision.

Conference participants supported RCAP's four guiding principles as a basis for a renewed relationship, agreeing that they are just as relevant today for all parties in the relationship, be they governments, civil society organizations, corporations or individuals. Because of this, they bear repeating.

3. Sharing

Creating harmonious social relationships through sharing is important. But so too is righting the imbalance of resource



1. Develop New Institutions

RCAP recommended a new Royal Proclamation stating Canada's commitment to a new relationship and companion legislation setting out a treaty process and recognition of Aboriginal nations and governments.

It proposed an Aboriginal order of government subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with authority over matters related to the good government and welfare of Aboriginal peoples and their territories.

It also recommended replacing the federal department with two departments – one concerned with the relationship with Aboriginal nations and one to provide services for non-self-governing communities.

Metis self-government would also be recognized and a land base

It remains unclear what that framework will look like. But there can be no doubt that reformatted nation to nation and nation to Crown relationships will require vast institutional changes to federal

support it.

"We know what is needed is a total renewal of the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples," the prime minister

the Prime Minister on release of the Final Report of the Truth and

The concept of nation to nation and nation to Crown relationships has gained momentum and remains a foundation for the future. However, pollster Michael Adams, founding president of Environics Research Group, pointed out that while there is growing support

Communities face the struggle of re-engaging people robbed of a sense of agency by the colonial experience. Their problem-solving should be driven by themselves and the federal government and provinces should take supporting roles as they embark on their own critical self-examination of where their policies and actions hinder progress for Indigenous people.

Forum participants noted that a sound and just institutional foundation for the relationship may reduce the need for short-term and conditional programs that are intended to remediate crises and gaps.

Continued reliance on programs in preference to institution building was seen as problematic.

2. Foster Vibrant Communities

There are many vibrant First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities, including in cities, across Canada.

But there are many others where life expectancy is lower. Illness is more common and social problems, from violence to alcohol abuse,

occur more often. Indigenous communities tend to have fewer highD(mor)21 (e)10 (c)13 (ommon and I10 (e)2h.ioo)27 (vn)2 (t duons,)2 should shortt
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Conference participants also emphasized the importance of entrepreneurial support for local Indigenous businesses as a proactive way of combatting joblessness and empowering youth.

3. Education

Two areas of education stood out during the forum – for non-

group, in the 20 years since RCAP, many Canadians have seized on the notion that the Canadian history they learned in school was grossly inadequate and misleading at best.

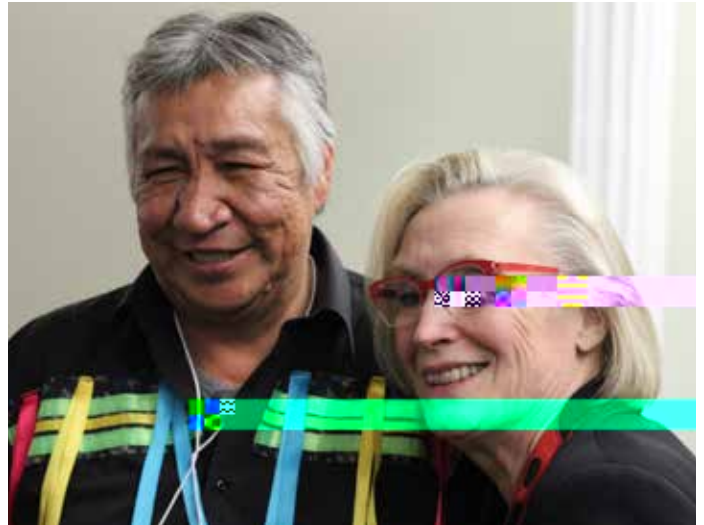
This momentum needs to be sustained and accelerated. We need to educate ourselves about Indigenous history, including

challenges, as well as the aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

take the form of federal recognition of Indigenous government authorities and the transfer from the federal level to Indigenous governments of the requisite resources.

How can this be implemented? Programs such as Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) and On-Reserve (AHSOR) are hidden gems that are holistic in nature and require support and promotion. Archibald and Hare's paper for the forum provides essential information for this early childhood

Principles for Implementation



Conclusion

First Nations, Metis and Inuit participants in

For More Information:

Visit the conference website at: www.queensu.ca/RCAP20



Access reports and recommendations from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples at Libraries and Archives Canada: www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/introduction.aspx

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