

At Commission hearings, we heard from many Survivors about windows. We heard from those who looked out from the school windows, waiting and hoping to see their parents come for them; those who cried when no one came for them, especially when it was Christmas or another holiday. We heard from those who were told, sometimes being pulled away from the window by the hair, to “get away from that window,” or “your parents are not coming for you anyway.” We heard from those who simply looked out into the dark or into the distance, crying because they were so lonesome and homesick. Windows were also a beacon of hope. Survivors also told us how they smiled and laughed and couldn’t contain their tears of joy when they looked out the window and saw their parents or grandparents coming to visit them or take them away from the school.²²³ The windows of the residential schools evoked both good and bad memories for Survivors. Thus, a commemorative window seems a fitting monument to remember and honour the children who went to residential schools.

Commemorations in highly visible public spaces such as the parliament buildings create openings for dialogue about what happened, why, and what can be learned from this history. Through dialogue, citizens can strengthen their ability to “accommodate difference, acknowledge injustice, and demonstrate a willingness to share authority over the past.”²²⁴ In the context of national reconciliation, ongoing public commemoration has the potential to contribute to human rights education in the broadest sense.

Although Canada’s commemorative window was a significant gesture of reconciliation, the Commission believes that the federal government must do more to ensure that national commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools becomes an integral part of Canadian heritage and national history. Under the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* (1985), the minister responsible for Parks Canada has the authority to designate historic sites of national significance and approve commemorative monuments or plaques.²²⁵ The minister is advised by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada “on the commemoration of nationally significant aspects of Canada’s past, including the designation of national historic sites, persons and events.”²²⁶ The board reviews and makes recommendations on submissions received from Canadian citizens who make nominations through the National Program of Historical Commemoration.²²⁷ Heritage sites, monuments, and plaques that celebrate Canada’s past are common, but commemorating those aspects of our national history that reveal cultural genocide, human rights violations, racism, and injustice are more problematic.

As we noted earlier, at the international level, the *Joinet-Orentlicher Principles* adopted by the United Nations have established that states have a responsibility to take measures to ensure that collective violence against a targeted group of people does not reoccur. In addition to providing compensation, making apologies, and undertaking educational reform, states also have a duty “to remember.” Under Principle 2,

A people’s knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and, as such, must be preserved by appropriate measures in fulfillment of the State’s duty