

the immense damages from colonialism. As Chief Doug S. White III (Kwulasultun) puts it ... “Indigenous law is the great project of Canada and it is the essential work of our time. It is not for the faint of heart, it is hard work. We need to create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to critically engage in this work because all our futures depend on it.”<sup>51</sup>

## Call to Action:

- 50) In keeping with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, we call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations, to fund the establishment of Indigenous law institutes for the development, use, and understanding of Indigenous laws and access to justice in accordance with the unique cultures of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

## Reconciliation and accountability

### Victims of violence; holders of rights

Survivors are more than just victims of violence. They are also holders of Treaty, constitutional, and human rights.<sup>52</sup> They are women and men who have resilience, courage, and vision. Many have become Elders, community leaders, educators, lawyers, and political activists who are dedicated to revitalizing their cultures, languages, Treaties, laws, and governance systems. Through lived experience, they have gained deep insights into what victims of violence require to heal. Equally important, they have provided wise counsel to political leaders, legislators, policymakers, and all citizens about how to prevent such violence from happening again.

The Commission agrees with Anishinaabe scholar and activist Leanne Simpson, who has urged Canadians not to think about reconciliation in narrow terms or to view Survivors only as victims. She said:

If reconciliation is focused only on residential schools rather than the broader set of relationships that generated policies, legislation, and practices aimed at assimilation and political genocide, then there is a risk that reconciliation will “level the playing field” in the eyes of Canadians.... I also worry that institutionalization of a narrowly defined “reconciliation” subjugates treaty and nation-based participation by locking our Elders—the ones that suffered the most directly at the hands of the residential school system—into a position of victimhood. Of course, they are anything but victims. They are our strongest visionaries and they inspire us to vision alternative futures.<sup>53</sup>