

involved armed resistance led by militarily trained Mohawk warriors.⁵ It was an event that shook Canada's complacency about Aboriginal demands to the core. Shortly after an end to the siege had been negotiated, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney wrote:

The summer's events must not be allowed to over-shadow the commitment that my government has made to addressing the concerns of aboriginal people....

These grievances raise issues that deeply affect all Canadians and therefore must be resolved by all Canadians working together.... The government's agenda responds to the demands of aboriginal peoples and has four parts: resolving land claims; improving the economic and social conditions on reserves; defining a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and governments; and addressing the concerns of Canada's aboriginal peoples in contemporary Canadian life.

Consultation with aboriginal peoples and respect for the fiduciary responsibilities of the Crown are integral parts of the process. The federal government is determined to create a new relationship among aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians based on dignity, trust and respect.⁶

The Government of Canada subsequently created a Royal Commission to look into the state of affairs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Royal Commission provided a glimpse into just how bad things had become.

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) put forward a bold and comprehensive vision of reconciliation. The RCAP report observed that if Canada was to thrive in the future, the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown must be transformed. The report concluded that the policy of assimilation was a complete failure and that Canada must look to the historical Treaty relationship to establish a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, based on the principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility.⁷

The Royal Commission emphasized that Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination is essential to a robust upholding of Canada's constitutional obligations to Aboriginal peoples and compliance with international human rights law. In other words, the RCAP report saw reconciliation as placing a heavy onus on the Government of Canada to change its conduct and to see the validity of the Aboriginal perspective of how the relationship should be in the future.

In the years following the release of the RCAP report, developing a national vision of reconciliation has proved to be challenging. In principle, Aboriginal peoples, governments, and the courts agree that reconciliation is needed. In practice, it has been difficult to create the conditions for reconciliation to flourish.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, including the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, was an attempt to resolve the thousands of lawsuits brought against the government for cases of historical abuse. Its implementation has also been challenging. Canada and the churches have made apologies to Survivors, their families, and communities. Yet, Canadian government actions continue