

cultural dimension of memorial processes, including where repression has targeted indigenous peoples.<sup>233</sup>

The Commission concurs with these conclusions and recommendations. They are consistent with our own findings on the residential schools commemoration projects. These Survivor-driven, community-based initiatives revealed the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and revitalizing Indigenous memory practices in commemorating the history and legacy of residential schools. They demonstrated the critical role that artists play in healing and commemoration.

The Commission believes that Canada's national heritage network also has a vital role to play in reconciliation. Our views were further confirmed in a study of residential school commemorations in the context of Canada's national heritage and commemoration policy. The research documented the Assembly of First Nations' and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's national commemoration project to create a heritage plaque program to place commemorative markers at all residential school sites across the country.<sup>234</sup> Faced with logistical challenges and based on input from Survivors and communities, "the project transformed from what ostensibly had been an IRS [Indian Residential School] site heritage plaque program to a community-oriented public monumental art project."<sup>235</sup> The commemorative markers were not placed at residential school sites, many of which are in remote locations or otherwise inaccessible. Instead, they were placed in Aboriginal communities where Survivors and their families could access them more easily, where ceremonies and community events could be held, and where there were opportunities for ongoing healing, commemoration, and education.<sup>236</sup>

The study revealed the fundamental tensions that exist between the goals of Aboriginal peoples and Canada with regard to the commemoration of residential schools. Under the existing policies of Parks Canada's Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada National Program of Historical Commemoration, residential school sites do not meet the program criteria for heritage designation, which is based on Western heritage values of conservation and preservation.<sup>237</sup> For Survivors, their families, and communities, commemorating their residential school experiences does not necessarily involve preserving the school buildings, but is intended instead to contribute to individual and collective healing. For example, a residential school located in Port Alberni, British Columbia, was demolished by Survivors and their families, who burned sage and cedar in ceremonies in order to "cleanse and allow the trapped spirits to finally be freed."<sup>238</sup> Where commemoration activities have involved the destruction of a residential school structure, such actions are in direct conflict with Canadian heritage goals.<sup>239</sup>

Ultimately, reconciliation requires a paradigm shift in Canada's national heritage values, policies, and practices that focus on conservation and continue to exclude Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices, which prioritize healing and the reclaiming of culture in public commemoration.<sup>240</sup> For this to happen, Parks Canada's heritage and commemoration policies and programs must change.