

and credibility of the state's justice system. But de Greiff cautions that implementing these measures alone does not guarantee that reconciliation will follow. Apologies, commemoration, public memorials, and educational reform are also required in order to transform social attitudes and foster long-term reconciliation.⁵⁷

The Treaty, constitutional, and human rights violations that occurred in and around the residential school system confirm the dangers that exist for Aboriginal peoples when their right to self-determination is ignored or limited by the state, which purports to act "in their best interests." Historically, whenever Aboriginal peoples have been targeted as a specific group that is deemed by government to be in need of protective legislation and policies, the results have been culturally and ethnically destructive.

For Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the protection and exercise of their right to self-determination is the strongest antidote to further violation of their rights. In the coming years, governments must remain accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal peoples' rights are protected and that government actions do, in fact, repair trust and foster reconciliation. Repairing trust begins with an apology, but it involves far more than that.

Moving from apology to action

From the outset, this Commission has emphasized that reconciliation is not a one-time event; it is a multi-generational journey that involves all Canadians. The public apologies and compensation to residential school Survivors, their families, and communities by Canada and the churches that ran the residential schools marked the beginning, not the end, of this journey. Survivors needed to hear government and church officials admit that the cultural, spiritual, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that they suffered in the schools was wrong and should never have happened, but they needed more.

The children and grandchildren of Survivors needed to hear the truth about what happened to their parents and grandparents in the residential schools. At the Commission's public events, many Survivors spoke in the presence of their children and grandchildren for the first time about the abuses they had suffered as children, and about the destructive ways of behaving they had learned at residential school. Many offered their own heartfelt apologies to their families for having been abusive, or unable to parent, or simply to say "I love you."

Apologies are important to victims of violence and abuse. Apologies have the potential to restore human dignity and empower victims to decide whether they accept an apology or forgive a perpetrator. Where there has been no apology, or one that victims believe tries to justify the behaviour of perpetrators and evade responsibility, reconciliation is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The official apologies from Canada and the churches sent an important message to all Canadians that Aboriginal peoples had suffered grievous harms at the hands of the state and church institutions in the schools, and that, as the parties