

Aboriginal Youth Council, and the broader Aboriginal community, in the planning and programs developed by the museum.¹⁴⁴

Given the deep controversies that exist regarding the history of the residential school system, it is perhaps not surprising that the CMHR was criticized by the Southern Chiefs Organization in Manitoba in June of 2013, after media reports that the museum would not “label human rights violations against First Nations as genocide.” From the Southern Chiefs Organization’s perspective, the museum was “sanitizing the true history of Canada’s shameful treatment of First Nations.”¹⁴⁵ Stuart Murray issued a statement on July 26, 2013, clarifying the museum’s position.

In the Museum, we will examine the gross and systemic human rights violation of Indigenous peoples. This will include information about the efforts of the Aboriginal community, and others, to gain recognition of these violations as genocide—and we will use that word. We will look at the ways this recognition can occur when people combat denial and work to break the silence surrounding such horrific abuses.... We have chosen, at present, not to use the word “genocide” in the title for one of the exhibits about this experience, but will be using the term in the exhibit itself when describing community efforts for this recognition. Historical fact and emerging information will be presented to help visitors reach their own conclusions. While a museum does not have the power to make declarations of genocide, we can certainly encourage—through ongoing partnership with the Indigenous community itself—an honest examination of Canada’s human rights history, in hopes that respect and reconciliation will prevail.¹⁴⁶

The museum signalled its intention to create opportunities for Canadians to engage in a much broader and long-overdue public dialogue about the issue of genocide as it relates to the residential school system. The CMHR envisioned creating a public education venue for teaching all Canadians to think more critically about the history of human rights violations against Aboriginal peoples.

Speaking about the forthcoming 2017 commemoration of Canada’s Confederation, Murray observed that Canada’s human rights record is not unblemished, and that

for many Aboriginal communities, this is not necessarily an event that warrants celebration. But by looking honestly and openly at our past, by engaging a diversity of voices and perspectives, and by celebrating what has been accomplished to overcome these mistakes, we will serve to make our nation more united, more proud, and more just. We can use this anniversary to continue on a journey of reconciliation.¹⁴⁷

The Commission believes that, as Canada’s 150th anniversary approaches in 2017, national reconciliation is the most suitable framework to guide commemoration of this significant historical benchmark in Canada’s history. This intended celebration can be an opportunity for Canadians to take stock of the past, celebrating the country’s accomplishments without shirking responsibility for its failures. Fostering more inclusive public