

non-Indian Canadian culture through radio, television, public address system, movies, books, newspapers, group activities, etc.”¹⁹

Despite the coercive measures that the government adopted, it failed to achieve its policy goals. Although Aboriginal peoples and cultures have been badly damaged, they continue to exist. Aboriginal people have refused to surrender their identity. It was the former students, the Survivors of Canada’s residential schools, who placed the residential school issue on the public agenda. Their efforts led to the negotiation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that mandated the establishment of a residential school Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

The Survivors acted with courage and determination. We should do no less. It is time to commit to a process of reconciliation. By establishing a new and respectful relationship, we restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned.

Reconciliation at the crossroads

To some people, *reconciliation* is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert never has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To others, reconciliation, in the context of Indian residential schools, is similar to dealing with a situation of family violence. It’s about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward. It is in the latter context that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has approached the question of reconciliation.

To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.

We are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But, we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it. Our ambition is to show how we can do that.

In 1996, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* urged Canadians to begin a national process of reconciliation that would have set the country on a bold new path, fundamentally changing the very foundations of Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Much of what the Royal Commission had to say has been ignored by government; a majority of its recommendations were never implemented. But the report and its findings opened people’s eyes and changed the conversation about the reality for Aboriginal people in this country.

In 2015, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada wraps up its work, the country has a rare second chance to seize a lost opportunity for reconciliation. We live in