

Let's Talk about Reconciliation

Proposal for a series of country-wide dialogues on reconciliation

Background

The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published in June 2015 focused on the Indian residential school system, whose impact is still being felt by Canada's Indigenous peoples. The TRC's Calls to Action reminded governments and civil society organizations of how urgent and important it is to become actively engaged on behalf of reconciliation and to work to strengthen ties with Indigenous peoples.

The reconciliation process is a lengthy one that requires both collective and individual effort. Even though the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) is not mentioned in them, some of these Calls to Action are perfectly aligned with CCUNESCO's strategic objectives and mandate. As the world will be marking the 10th anniversary of the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in September 2017, and UNESCO will be finalizing its policy on engagement with Indigenous peoples, CCUNESCO would like to play a stronger leadership role in Canada and internationally to help make a difference on the reconciliation front.

The CCUNESCO Secretariat has already committed itself to including reconciliation in its operational plan, and to proposing concrete initiatives to ensure that efforts deployed on behalf of reconciliation yield tangible results and strengthen ties with Canada's Indigenous peoples. Three major thrusts will complement and guide the Commission's efforts over the coming years:

1. Calling attention to initiatives that evidence reconciliation in action
2. Including Indigenous culture, expertise and perspectives in CCUNESCO's work
3. Creating conditions that make it possible for Indigenous peoples to embrace CCUNESCO and UNESCO programs

The Secretariat has already set a number of initiatives in motion to reflect its engagement, and it is currently considering other more strategic actions to affirm its commitment and make a difference where reconciliation is concerned.

Launch of a series of dialogues about reconciliation

To help accomplish this, the Secretariat is exploring the possibility of launching a series of dialogues across Canada to talk about reconciliation. The idea for this series emerged from discussions held with Indigenous members of the Commission and numerous other partners, some of whom were directly involved in the Calls to Action. It also stems from the distressing fact that very few Canadians have any real knowledge of Indigenous peoples, whether First Nations, Metis or Inuit. As the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission pointed out, far too many do not truly understand the concept of reconciliation. There is therefore an opportunity to work with various Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to change things and make a real difference.

Objectives of the series of dialogues

- Create spaces for connection and dialogue to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in a spirit of openness and mutual discovery.
- Facilitate inspiring discussions that will serve to establish and strengthen ties between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- Inform and educate the general public about the realities and aspirations of Indigenous peoples.
- Generate critical ideas on the rights of Indigenous peoples, as articulated in the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which will serve as a framework for reconciliation.
- Focus on the rich cultures, histories, expertise and epistemologies of our Indigenous peoples.

Framework for dialogue

It has been suggested that public libraries and/or other gathering places like museums should serve as the setting for connection and dialogue. Such places are readily accessible in every part of the country and are already part of the networks of the Commission and its partners.

Depending on the circumstances, the conversations could be preceded by a screening of an NFB film made by an Indigenous person, thus providing an insider's look at works that report on the histories and cultures that we want to place at the centre of these dialogues.

The subjects would be selected jointly with the key Indigenous stakeholders contacted and the celebrities invited. If circumstances allow, topics could bring in members of the public from the host city or community. The cities that are signatories to the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD), one of CCUNESCO's major networks, could be called upon to get local politicians, including mayors, involved in the initiative.

Potential partners

- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- Canadian Urban Libraries Council
- DestiNations
- Landscape of Nations
- Exeko
- Plenty Canada
- Reconciliation Canada
- Wapikoni
- Library and Archives Canada
- Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination
- Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Canada Council for the Arts
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
- Canadian Museum of History
- National Film Board of Canada
- The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network

Length of project

The plan is to launch the project on an exploratory basis in 2017, with activities held in at least 10 municipalities across the country. The goal is to continue the project in subsequent years, making adjustments as required on the basis of the outcomes.