



CONCEPT PAPER¹

NORTHERN NATIONAL EVENT

INUVIK, Northwest Territories

June 28-July 1, 2011

CHALLENGE:

For well over a century, several generations of aboriginal children in Canada were taken away, often forcibly, from their homes, families and communities for weeks, months, and sometimes years at a time. Many also suffered various forms of abuse while at the schools where they were sent to live. The cost has been a legacy of widespread trauma and inter-generational impacts. Yet the story of residential schools is still relatively unknown and little understood by many.

A core mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is to educate *all* Canadians about the complete history of the so-called 'Indian residential schools', and to inspire reconciliation for individuals, families, communities, religious entities, government, and the people of Canada.

Seven TRC National Events must contribute to this healing of survivors, their families and the nation.

To be successful, highly publicized events, each event will:

- **Build** on the successes of the first (June 2010) National Event in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and incorporate feedback and lessons learned from the preceding national event, and other exemplary community events
- **Educate** participants, and fellow Canadians, about Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the role of Survivors, the Parties, and all Canadians
- **Share Truth**, through hearing the compelling experiences of those affected by residential schools, their families and others
- **Inspire Reconciliation**, through hearing current efforts and wise practices by community members, governments, churches, and others to reconcile past events and present relationships
- **Introduce** new Champions of Reconciliation as key supporters of the Truth and Reconciliation initiative and its potential for Canada
- **Engage** a growing number of Canadians and partners willing to become actively involved in this important national initiative through follow-up activities.

¹ *Discussed and approved by TRC Commissioners- January 2011*



PURPOSE:

The Mandate of the TRC describes a specific role for the National Events:

“The national events are a mechanism through which the truth and reconciliation process will engage the Canadian public and provide education about the IRS system, the experience of former students and their families, and the ongoing legacies of the institutions.

The Commission shall fund and host seven national events in different regions across the country for the purpose of:

- (a) sharing information with/from the communities;*
- (b) supporting and facilitating the self empowerment of former IRS students and those affected by the IRS legacy;*
- (c) providing a context and meaning for the Common Experience Payment;*
- (d) engaging and educating the (Canadian) public through mass communications;*
- (e) otherwise achieving its goals.”*

The Mandate also says:

“National events should include the following common components:

- an opportunity for a sample number of former students and families to share their experiences;*
- an opportunity for some communities...to share their experiences as they related to the impacts on communities and to share insights from their community reconciliation processes;*
- an opportunity for participation and sharing of information and knowledge among former students, their families, communities, experts, church and government officials, institutions and the Canadian public;*
- ceremonial transfer of knowledge through the passing of individual statement transcripts or community reports/statements...*
- analysis of the short and long term legacy of the IRS system on individuals, communities, groups, institutions and Canadian society including the intergenerational impacts of the IRS system;*
- participation of high level church and government officials;*
- health supports and trauma experts during and after the ceremony for all participants.”*



LOCATION for Second National Event- INUVIK, Northwest Territories:

- The TRC's advisory Survivors Committee recommended that one of the seven national events be held in the North.
- The national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanataami (ITK), in its first meeting with TRC Commissioners in July 2009, asked for one of the seven TRC national events to be in the north, specifically in Inuvik.
- The Inuvialuit of the western Arctic sent a formal motion to the TRC asking for the national event to be in Inuvik
- The Gwichin (members of the Dene Nation) sent a formal motion to the TRC asking for the national event to be in Inuvik.
- The Sahtu Secretariat, representing the Dene of the Great Bear Lake region of the Mackenzie Valley, sent the TRC a letter of endorsement for the national event to be in Inuvik
- The Dene Nation, representing all the First Nation Chiefs of the Northwest Territories region, passed a formal motion asking for the national event to be somewhere in Denendeh, (the homeland area of the Dene people). The Inuvik area is part of that homeland for the Gwichin, who are part of the Dene Nation.
- Most Yukon communities have road access to Inuvik through the Dempster highway system.

CONTEXT:

- The three northern Territories and Arctic Quebec make up more than a third of the entire Canadian land mass, in the most isolated and least populated part of the country.
- Most communities have less than a thousand people and about two-thirds have no road access. Total population of the entire region is about 120 thousand people.
- Two of the three Territories have an aboriginal majority population.
- Aboriginal languages are still widely spoken in most rural Dene regions of the Northwest Territories, in northern Yukon, in most communities of Nunavut, and in arctic Quebec (Nunavik).
- Due to the high percentage of aboriginal citizens, the northern territories have the highest ratio of residential school students per capita
- Inuvik is located in the Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta region of the NWT, a cultural cross-roads, with overlapping homelands of Inuvialuit (Inuit) and Gwichin (Dene), as well as significant Metis and non-aboriginal populations throughout the Mackenzie valley to the south, and the Yukon to the south-west.
- There are 14 NWT residential schools acknowledged in the IRS settlement agreement
- Only two of the IRSSA church Parties ran Residential schools in the North: Catholic and Anglican.



- Both churches ran major residences in Inuvik, the site of the northern national event, as well as in nearby smaller communities.
- The majority of Inuit children attended Anglican-run residences. The majority of Dene children attended Catholic-run residences.
- Conflicts among school children along these two religious and ethnic lines are part of the residential school story in this region, and across the North.
- The northern national event presents an opportunity and potential for powerful reconciliation gestures and activities along these same lines: between Dene and Inuit individuals and organizations, and between Catholic and Anglican churches.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Canada's TRC is about something our country did to generations of its own little children, and their families. We have not been the country we thought we were.
- Canada, and our society, is still paying the price for that history today, in the everyday realities of our urban and aboriginal communities, and in our international reputation for how we regard our indigenous peoples.
- The impact of Canada's Residential Schools has not been felt only by Aboriginal children. The issue has affected and continues to affect all Canadians. Several generations of non-Aboriginal children have been ingrained with racist beliefs taught in Canada's schools. While Aboriginal children were being taught in Residential Schools that their languages, race and culture were inferior, non-Aboriginal children were being taught the same thing in their schools. There is a need to reform school curricula about this history everywhere.
- This is not a situation created *by* aboriginal people. We have a shared responsibility to set things right.
- The TRC is *not* a government program. It is sponsored by residential school Survivors, with commitments, as ordered by the courts, from the federal government, and the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches.
- Truth and reconciliation matters to *all* Canadians. As we explore with honesty a sad part of our past, we work to build a positive, courageous image of how we now wish to see ourselves, and wish to be seen by the rest of the world community.
- This is an historic opportunity to begin new relationships of respect between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians, and to serve as a model to the world.
- The TRC challenges all Canadians to learn about this history, and to initiate and engage in reconciliation actions and activities.



PRINCIPLES FOR NATIONAL EVENTS:

The Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, soon after their appointment, made several strategic decisions about National Events:

1. National Events as Mandate Milestones

The TRC faces limited time and financial resources. National Events are an ideal opportunity to maximize resources by incorporating activities related to *all* components of the TRC Mandate.

Each National Event will be designed to advance each of the many, distinct obligations under the Mandate and to report overall progress on them:

- sharing and witnessing the Truth of survivors and their communities, and others affected by the school experience;
- sharing Research findings about residential school history and impacts;
- Commemorating various aspects of this history;
- Educating the public;
- supporting emotional and spiritual Healing
 - through provision of contemporary and traditional health supports
 - through provision of cultural teachings and reflection
 - through traditional and contemporary musical celebration
- sharing and honouring examples of meaningful Reconciliation between and among various Parties to the residential school settlement agreement;
- gathering materials for the eventual National Research Centre
 - through collection of written, spoken, audio-visual and other individual and group “statements”
 - through documentation of all of the above

2. Survivors as Focal Point

Each TRC national event will maintain an important focus on children. This Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the first in the world to focus specifically on something that happened to *children*, and children of a specific ethnicity. Most of those still alive are now elderly adults

Thousands of others died while at the schools, and many others have been lost to untimely, premature deaths, and are no longer with us to tell their story.

The National Events will honour all these former little ones by involving an appropriate number of intergenerational survivors, including young children:

- They will serve as a present-day reminder of the ages of children who were removed from their parents for long periods of time.
- They will help other Canadians ‘feel’ and relate to the enormity of the impact on family and community of having so many children removed from them.
- They will help keep the focus of TRC work on Survivors and their descendants



3. Reconciliation as Component of all Activities

The past cannot be changed, but a new understanding of it can lead to respectful relations for the future. This is one of the greatest hopes for the TRC; a growing reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians.

- Each National event will strive to inspire Reconciliation, by demonstrating values which the Commissioners believe to lie at the heart of Reconciliation: respect, courage, humility, truth, honesty, wisdom and love. These values are known by many aboriginal peoples as “the seven sacred teachings”. They are also in the ancient teachings of most world religions.
- Each National Event, and the planning leading up to it, will include meaningful involvement by all Parties to the IRS Agreement.
- Each National Event will honour purposeful contributions made by growing numbers of other organizations, agencies or companies.

4. Cultural Celebration

One of the most frequently mentioned “harms” from the residential schools is the loss of aboriginal language, cultural identity and indigenous pride. Intergenerational “survivors” express frustration and anger at what they have *not* been taught about who they are as distinct peoples. Efforts are underway in many aboriginal communities to restore traditional and cultural knowledge and pride.

Each National Event will honour, respect, and offer teachings about the indigenous cultural context of the place where it is held:

- a. All cultures will be welcomed into this specific cultural context
- b. Events will be generally open to the public except for designated private activities
- c. Events will be free

5. National Events as a National Journey

National Events are the greatest TRC opportunity to attract national (and international) media and political attention. It is important to hold and expand that interest for each event throughout the term of the TRC.

Each National Event will be designed to be ‘part of the whole’.

Each National Event will link thematically to the next one, building momentum and profile leading up to the TRC Closing Ceremony.



PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS:

To address the above Principles, the following key creative components should be part of each National Event:

1. Traditional ceremony -

- relevant to the indigenous peoples of the location where the National Event is being held
- Ceremony to mark official opening and closing, and appropriate moments throughout events.

NOTE: Traditions for Northern National Event must be relevant to regional Inuit and Dene homelands, in respect of shared Inuvialuit and Gwichin territory.

2. Public Education -

- to explain residential school history and legacy, Settlement Agreement, and TRC mandate
- to publicly release and spotlight new findings of research commissioned by TRC as it becomes available
- to maximize use of new and conventional media, regional, national, and international
- to engage and involve Ministries and Departments of Education, and universities, colleges and schools.

3. Truth-telling -

- **Group** Sharing by Survivors and others, of aspects of their school experiences and/or how they have been affected by this experience
- **Individual** Designated Speakers to Share their School story, and healing journey
- **Private** statement gathering

4. Public Reconciliation -

- To pledge and showcase reconciliation gestures, actions and intentions by governments, churches, the business sector, communities, families, individuals, or other committed groups and citizens.
- To express reconciliation through creative collaboration activities (music, writing, art, comedy, blanket ceremonies, etc.)

5. Commemoration -

- To recall former students, especially those who did not survive the residential school experience.



- To share new/latest information about research and field work related to burial sites and unmarked graves
- To re-create missed opportunities from childhood experiences
- To recall and possibly re-create positive school experiences
- ***To share information about existing community commemoration initiatives***

6. Cultural and Artistic Expression and Celebration of Achievement -

- To share artistic expressions related to the school experience or legacy
- To showcase artistic collaborations as voices of reconciliation, ***healing*** and inspiration.
- To showcase cultural voices that have survived in spite of the schools
- To celebrate emerging and evolving cultural expression
- To have fun!

7. Witnessing -

- To recall and explain the ancient spiritual practice of Witnessing, as specified in the TRC Mandate
- To demonstrate traditional witnessing by designating, and calling on, witnesses:
 - for each day of the TRC event, and
 - for the overall 4-day event

8. Engagement -

- To identify and build a growing circle of reconciliation ‘advocates’ beyond the TRC staff and the official Parties to the IRS Agreement
- To ensure ongoing work of Reconciliation beyond the National Event, and beyond the term of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

9. Documentation -

- To ensure accountability for the National Event
- To ensure available materials for ongoing TRC outreach and educational activities.
- To ensure a credible, audio-visual record for historic and National Research Centre purposes.

10. Regional Tour -

- During the months preceding the national event
- To take the form of community hearings before Commissioner/s
- To maximize Survivor access to TRC, in order to share their experiences, and provide personal statements or submissions



- To build awareness of TRC and profile for upcoming national event
- To allow involvement of those unable to attend National Event
- To document visual elements from the communities for possible inclusion in National Event activities.