

# **Indigenous Worldviews on Truth and Reconciliation: Towards a Community-Based Truth and Reconciliation Process**

**June 14, 2008**

**Native Education Centre , Vancouver , British Columbia**

## **Report**

This public forum coincided with the week of the government's apology. As a result, space was opened up for dialogue, a space that might not have happened earlier.

One hundred and thirty eight people registered for the event, both before and on the day, while about 18 who registered before the date did not attend. We received about 10 written reflections on the day and 5 oral ones and had a few people call or write us with comments in the week after. Overall people were very pleased and felt it was "a start". We are having these responses summarized in an evaluation report which will be available in August.

We have decided to send a compilation of all the small group reports rather than summarize them, as each person's words were so strong and there was much insight that would be lost in a summary. We have included all the legible answers to the two questions and only edited out ones that were not clear. We recommend you take time to read and reflect on what was said in the small groups.

This report and video and audio clips from the event are available on our website at <http://www.interfaithjustpeace.org/multimedia.php>.

Having reviewed the small group reports and the process of the forum, as the planning team, we would like to make the following recommendations to whomever will be organizing truth and reconciliation processes in their communities.

- The circle should be used as much as possible as circle teachings assume all are equal in the circle. No one faith practice is greater than any other in the circle.
- Non-Indigenous people have to be invited into the circle and need to understand the principle of equality as well as understand their role in this context. Non-Indigenous people can not assume bystander status or step out of the circle by assuming a place of power.
- Anti-racism training and learning about white privilege would greatly benefit white people who want to attend truth and reconciliation forums and could be part of the journey of white people in this process. For those who have not had this training, it could be offered prior to engagement with residential school survivors and their descendents.

We would like to thank Tom McCallum, Madeleine MacIvor, and Bob Joseph who were part of the planning and work team for the forum. We would like to thank Sylvia Dennis for the food.

Denise Nadeau and Bernadette Spence for the Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements.

### **What does Truth & Reconciliation mean for you?**

- The greatest dream of my life, acknowledge the pain: work together
- I don't have a definition – it is collective suffering
- Relate to the pain
- Relate to injustice, a political opportunity
- Despite the injustice not bitter, I believe in education both for self and others – my role is to be at meetings like this supporting issues while still having pride in our country . Continue to be moved by the Great Spirit.
- Has a lot of personal meaning (originally from South Africa) experienced reconciliation there. Importance of truth and forgiveness; however not a lot has changed in SA. Want to be part of something that addresses the systemic problems. A lot needs to be done b/c reconciliation is a long way down the road – How can I contribute here
- In looking back – visited a residential school as a school child and it changed my life. I had no idea. Learned hard lessons about racism. Currently looking for better ways to integrate traditional healing. T & R is about not becoming mainstream – and not having non-aboriginals being immobilized by guilt – accept responsibility collectively for what happened in the past and what can happen in the future (in a good way). Wants to be an ally. Wants to follow this path because it is right convergence
- Speaking from the heart, sees it as both a personal and collective journey. Grew up seeing both sides. Let's talk about teaching lies in schools. Wasn't allowed to reveal identity. Get rid of shame – where do we begin? How do we shift from victimhood and take control of the future. We are not a conquered ppl. We are allies. Really need to get the Canadian pop to understand on a grassroots level – to break down stereotypes. This didn't happen a long time ago – this is a contemporary issue – deal with contemporary institutional racism – let's really tell the truth about health care/education/respect (can't be us and them)
- How do you break a society? – attack the family language - it has to be built back up
- Deal with the intergenerational issues (make a paradigm shift based on nurturing recognizing one's own deficits in the past)
- A fundamental shift needs to take place in government's approach and attitude. Hold government accountable. Treaties need to be upheld and honoured.
- Healing comes from action
- Accept and acknowledge responsibility in the oppression.
- Process is sacred. Truth needs to lead to justice to achieve reconciliation
- What would it take for all Canadians to get from shame-apology to thanks and gratitude
- Truth is sharing stories. Reconciliation is confronting stereotypes, acknowledging them.
- All have own truths – we need to accept it as such. Don't like word reconciliation -- I don't have anything to reconcile
- Truth is acknowledging who I am, where I came from – trauma and all that pain because of it. Reconciliation harder – involves forgiveness. Also using my voice – saying my truth when others show their racist ignorance.

- Our daily lives, how to live them expecting respect as well as giving it. To be better people for each other.
- Here to understand more. My community needs to see that dysfunction is not normal. The legacy hard on those who didn't attend/ RSwwww – they don't know what to protect against
- Reconciliation about sharing stories – so much silence around them. Narratives don't allow the hard stories.
- Truth- making room for perspectives and experiences. Reconciliation – still trying to understand what it means.
- There are individual and collective truths. WE need people to be recipients of truth without defence
- How can state reconcile without knowing individual truths? Apology was a political affair – but i have mixed feelings. Reconciling demands action to right and wrongs based on indigenous worldviews. Reconciliation means something different in each of the 600 languages and tribes across Canada.
- Where do we go after we tell our stories? What is the next stage in the process?
- Action a key word for me. Reclaiming own culture. Resources needed for all ages to become healthier people and families. Canadian public needs to be educated about Aboriginals.
- Dismantling racist attitudes. More communication/dialogue be: education of children.
- Accept our part in the oppression and moving to right economic/social ways
- Dialogue. Racism learned, so can be unlearned.
- Not just IR schools but our children /grandchildren suffering too
- Internal healing and movement need to take place-within families, reserves, communities.
- Superior feeling people need to get out of the way
- Jam indigenous history down their throats as they did to us
- Seeing forth of each story
- Time , space, opportunity, resources for FNs to return to what they're meant to be.
- Recognizing children who are in need and young people who are addicted.
- I am here to listen.
- Newcomers need to learn about the history of the First Peoples
- I am shocked with what I have heard today.
- Stop generalizing.
- Aboriginal people are always put in the position of giving, of opening themselves, we are tired of that.
- White dominant culture needs to reconcile.
- Recognition of aboriginal rights and title, alleviation of poverty.
- Stories need to be told.
- Change racist attitudes in school, colleges.
- Finding peace with being part of an order that did wrong.
- Finding ways to make things right for children and families.
- "Return to Spirit"
- Forgiveness

- Truth telling is painful
- "Fixing it until it is right"
- Breaking through Denial
- Problems designed on need; not per capita
- Listening with the heart
- Respectful relationships
- Not carrying the secrets
- Recognizing the pain which has been carried for generations
- Healing and reconnection for people who have been separated from family and culture- involves all of us. So many incarcerated.
- Canada still has much to account for
- Pain of sharing
  - thanks and honour for sharing
  - support, transparency, education
  - i feel shame for what happened, what i didn't know
  - this has opened a door-we can talk
  - not from a "place of authority" coming down
  - the drum-invitation to engage, come together
  - -scary
  - -teaching s and traditions
  - reclaiming teaching
  - family, relationships
  - we keep doing harm done to us-learning not to
  - you have an opinion, you have a voice- I teach children this
  - I never thought I would see this happen in my lifetime. Never
  - advocacy
  - Truth and Recon- as recognition of ancient teachings
  - honour and privilege to hear family stories.history.testimony
  - opened dialogue in alienated family
- Recognizing the children who died and were not cared for.
  - spiritual/political/economic aspects of the process
  - taught as history in public schools
  - way to come together under one creator
  - importance of storytelling and oral tradition
  - Better experience for children and grandchildren
  - non-aboriginal learning/listening
  - trust, respect, communication and sharing
  - re-telling of stories, settlers listening/being forced to listen?
  - hearing success stories
  - starts on a personal level
  - RESILIENCE of aboriginal people-survivors vs victims
  - unity, respect, care
  - unity-not necessarily unanimity
  - conflict as a process of exploring humanity, seeing God in everyone

- everyone sees part of the picture, many truths
- involves some 'giving up', sharing by settlers
- 2 sides of reconciliation-aboriginal people who experienced residential schools
- others need to make conscious effort to connect through events like this
- Move forward with non-native brothers and sisters
- when I can put myself in your story and you can put yourself in mine it becomes our story
- ongoing process
- honour, not just accept differences
- telling the truth about what really happened-attempted "Final Solution"-
  - our definition of treaty
- going back to own rules of good behaviour- not about who is good or bad
- admit what they did
- let us be us
- honouring of treaties, land claims
- economic outcome (transferring control of resources)
- govt to put money where mouth is
- no more right to drill on people's lands
- clean water on reserves
- allow justice to take hold
- resolution and determination needed
- aboriginal kids education –to protest for rights
- apology is not the end
- sign declaration of indigenous rights
- not just words
- non-aboriginal people to stand behind aboriginal people. To say words not enough
- Christian people need to understand how offensive it is for us to hear them going on and on with their Christo-centric concepts, i.e. repentance and forgiveness
- Rather we need the Indigenous concept about "making things right"
- these so-called apologies are not directed at those of us who have reclaimed our Indigenous spiritual practice, they are directed at the Christian Indians because the churches are only concerned with 'keeping their flock' so to speak!
- non-aboriginal people not to speak for aboriginal
- need openness to learn and take cues
- truth-what is not biased ex. There is only 1 human race but different cultures
- reconciliation-revert to what life was like-get the land back
- break silence
- stand up for what's right
- seeing each other as human not aboriginal/non-aboriginal
- truth = what's in your mind, what you believe in
- some reconciliation has taken place over 20 years
- truth-valuing human rights
- reconciliation-forgiveness? Maybe
- more than just residential schools

- indigenous people to be received on their terms, with love, acceptance and humility
- get the land back
- resource management, partnership
- jobs
- define solution-one that satisfies everyone?
- inner peace
- not seeing all whites as enemy
- ?? No easy solutions
- those affected need to speak about what they need
- dialogue-understanding
- acknowledgement of extent of harm
- action ,remedy
- time, change
- non-indigenous people to learn process
- i have responsibility, thats why I am here
- the beautiful and the ugly and everywhere in between
- majority of Canadians have no idea what happened? People would be more understanding
- what does sorry mean unless there is change
- the white people and the native people need to be taught our differences - not pan - Indianism, we are not all the same
- the leaders need to recognize our own individuality
- Suffering loss of relationship
- Support in healing process.
- Love, support, healing process
- Failure of repentance
- Reframe question- What is the deepest meaning of T and R for you?
- What would it mean?
- Lost ability to raise and care for children in sacred way
- New covenant-new spiritual agreement
- Higher spiritual ,moral purpose
- Leave as champions of what is best
- Hearts, minds,spirits –where it counts
- relationships to land, animals, life forms (respect)
- Rewrite school curriculum history to correct injustices
- Respect everyone from all walks of life-living in harmony
- This forum as an act of reconciliation itself-opening up our connection to the natural world-importance of documenting stories
- Importance of ceremony(bringing it back)
- Some people aren't sure what the TRC process will bring and that's ok
- Difficult to hear terms of reconciliation in Christian terms-other side of the story also need to heard

## **What do you want to see happen so that this process benefits Indigenous people?**

- At post-secondary level: consciousness raising as well as in public school. Develop new curriculum.
- The government is still taking the children (foster care) address – powers that child and welfare have
- Support the families – don't break them up
- Get back the integrity and love (support land claims!)
- Land claim settlement – if it affects economy – they are settled, but if not just talks in progress. Apology as it affects economy. Progress re the economy
- We need time to mourn the terrible past before any next step.
- White people have to learn about white privilege before this process will work
- w/ceremony
- Indian act needs to be changed. Health system, Education system need to change.
- White people need to share history and past to recognize white privilege
- White dominant culture needs to reconcile. –
- restitution-Indigenous ways to hold ourselves accountable
- Support for healing
- -getting the message out
- -creation of personal relationships
- -education of non –aboriginal people on “whole” Canadian history as well as their own personal histories especially educators, health and childcare workers etc.
- Follow through on all levels (government)
- Reconciliation on multiple levels
- Recognition of aboriginal values and traditions by non-aboriginal people.
- non-aboriginal people supporting but not leading process
- education of settlers regarding history
- Where is the indigenous worldview in the TRC process? E.g many indigenous creation stories, the way we reject wrongs, achieve balance