

# Truth and Reconciliation in The AIP

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**A**s stated in the Agreement in Principle, truth and reconciliation for Indian Residential school survivors has been recognized and I will be discussing this in this month's issue of the Mi'kmaq Maliseet News. While all First Nations people know that that Indian Residential schools existed in Canada, many Canadians do not and this is why it's so very important for the truth to come out and be acknowledged.

If the Agreement in Principle is accepted by the courts and former students in Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation model will have its own commission to report to the Canadian public on what has happened to First Nation, Inuit and Metis children in Indian Residential schools and the lasting impacts that it's had. The goals in developing a truth and reconciliation model that recognizes the following principles:

- Reconciliation will need the involvement of everyone, such as the Indian Residential school students, their families, communities, the Federal Government, religious entities and the Canadian public.
- A completion of historical records to be gathered of the Residential school system to be archived and made accessible for future study and use.
- Truth and Reconciliation should promote awareness and public education to Canadians about what the Residential schools were, why they were set up and its impacts on human dignity of those children who were in Residential schools.
- Record the stories from the survivors and their families of their experiences in the Residential school and the impacts on their lives and family's lives in a culturally safe and appropriate place.

The truth and reconciliation body will have an Indian Residential School survivor committee composed of 10 representatives of various Aboriginal organizations, regions and survivor groups. This committee will advise on criteria for community processes and advise commissioners on issues related to the processes. A commission will also be set up, which will have 3 commissioners. These commissioners could be appointed from various backgrounds such as religious entities, former students, Aboriginal organizations and Government. The executive branch of the Federal Government will determine who will be on the commission based on discussions with the Assembly of First Nations. Regional liaison positions will also be created who will help in planning the national events and will act as representatives for the communities in the regions. These representatives will assist in planning community reconciliation events and provide continuity on the National level. The truth and reconciliation process wishes to obtain information and documents from all sources through voluntary cooperation with all relevant participants, such as the Federal Government and the churches, while at the same time, respecting the privacy of Indian Residential school survivors. Researchers for the commission must respect privacy in order to have access to relevant documents.

There will be a 2 year timeline to have completed a budget, research, historical findings of all of the Indian Residential schools in Canada, recommendations and National and community events to be completed. A five year mandate is required to complete all community reconciliation events and statement taking, the establishment of a research center and archive for all Canadians to see and an opportunity for survivors to file a personal statement, for that which there is no time limitation.

There will be seven National events in the provinces of Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, British Columbia and one territory where the Indian Residential schools existed. These events hope to achieve information sharing from communities by providing their experiences, educating and engaging the public by education on the Indian Residential school system and empowering survivors. Health supports and trauma experts will be at these events for the survivors and their families. Government officials and church officials will be invited to participate and bear witness at the final ceremony and the transfer of knowledge in the form of transcripts, individual statements and community statements to the head commissioner.

As for community events, First Nation communities in Canada can submit a proposal for their event to the truth and reconciliation National body and receive funding, pending on what their body allows. This is an opportunity for communities to have their own helpful event around the truth sharing process for survivors and their families in a safe, supportive and non-threatening environment for the purposes of taking statements by the commission, empower communities to form their own reconciliation practices for the future, educate the Canadian public and achieve better relations with neighboring communities and allow Government and Church officials to participate in the community event.

Although the truth and reconciliation process is stated in the Agreement in Principle, the AIP has not yet been recognized by the Courts and by the students. The courts must review the AIP between May and June 2006 and decide whether or not they find it acceptable for former students of Residential schools. If they don't accept the AIP, it becomes null and void. If they do find it acceptable, then the students will have to decide between June and December of 2006 whether it's suitable for them to participate in and they only need 5000 students across Canada to reject the AIP in order for it to become null and void. For any questions on the Agreement in Principle, you can contact lawyer, Mike Taylor of Joel E. Pink, Q.C. & Associates at (902) 492-0550 and their fax number is (902) 492-0570. Mr. Taylor's mailing address is:

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*For more information on the Alternative Dispute Resolution process, you can contact their help desk at (800)816-7293 or visit their website at [www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca](http://www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca).*

*For more information on the Indian Residential schools and the Agreement in Principle, you can also contact Georgianna Barlow of the Atlantic Policy Congress toll free at (877)667-4007 or email at [georgianna.barlow@apcfn.ca](mailto:georgianna.barlow@apcfn.ca). Please check out our website at [www.apcfn.ca](http://www.apcfn.ca).*