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# The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action

By Hilary Pearson, Bruce Lawson, Andrea Nemtin, Wanda Brascoupé Peters, Lucie Santoro, Sara Lyons and Victoria Grant

*This article is the second in a [series](#) on Indigenous Communities and Philanthropy.*

**SUMMARY:** On June 1, 2015, a group of Canadian philanthropic organizations and individual funders presented a collective Declaration of Action to the closing session of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Ottawa. Signatories pledge, among other things, to work towards reconciliation and the implementation of the spirit, intent, and content of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) recommendations and to ensure that the philanthropic community is engaged in the work of reconciliation. They agree not only to learn and remember, and understand and acknowledge the tragedy of the Residential School System and its effects on Indigenous communities, but also to participate and to act by sharing networks and resources, building relationships with Indigenous communities, and supporting the TRC's findings and recommendations.

**RÉSUMÉ :** Le 1<sup>er</sup> juin 2015, un groupe d'organisations philanthropiques canadiennes et de bailleurs de fonds individuels a présenté une Déclaration d'action collective lors de la séance de clôture de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation (CVR), à Ottawa. Les signataires s'engagent entre autres à travailler pour la réconciliation et à mettre en œuvre l'esprit, l'intention et le contenu des recommandations de la CVR, et à veiller à ce que la communauté philanthropique participe au travail de réconciliation. Ils conviennent non seulement d'apprendre et de se souvenir, de comprendre et de reconnaître la tragédie du système de pensionnats indiens ainsi que ses effets sur les communautés autochtones, mais aussi de participer et d'agir en partageant réseaux et ressources, en développant des relations avec les communautés autochtones, et en appuyant les conclusions et les recommandations de la CVR.

## Introduction

On June 1, a group of Canadian philanthropic organizations and individual funders presented a collective Declaration of Action to the closing session of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Ottawa. The signatories of this Declaration included The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, Philanthropic Foundations Canada, Community Foundations of Canada, and the Canadian

Environmental Grantmakers Network, as well as more than twenty of their respective members.

Why take this unprecedented step to create a joint declaration? As key nongovernmental funders of Canadian civil society's work to improve communities, this group was compelled by the significance and urgency of the challenge posed to us and to all Canadians by the Commission: How do we respond meaningfully to the courageous testimony of so many generations of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples affected by the residential school experience? This declaration is a way to acknowledge and to honour the survivors by making a commitment to listen and to learn from their experience, to act to build new relationships with Canada's Indigenous peoples that will support their healing, to work towards reconciliation and the implementation of the spirit, intent, and content of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) recommendations.

The declaration came together very quickly – clearly an idea that was the right one at the right time. It was inspired by the leaders of philanthropic organizations already engaged with the work of building new relationships with the Indigenous community, including Wanda Brascoupé Peters of The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; Victoria Grant, board chair of both The Circle and of Community Foundations Canada; Andrea Nemtin of the Inspirit Foundation; Lucie Santoro of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative; Sara Lyons of Community Foundations Canada; Hilary Pearson of Philanthropic Foundations Canada; and Bruce Lawson of The Counselling Foundation of Canada (and chair of Philanthropic Foundations Canada). Over the course of four weeks, the group worked to produce a draft declaration and to share it with their members and colleagues. By the time the declaration was formally signed on the evening of May 30, over 25 philanthropic organizations had stepped forward to make a commitment to the work. Many of the signatories are already active, while others are committing to become more active.

On the morning of June 1, signatories collectively stood together to present the Declaration to TRC representatives, to survivors and to the witnesses present. It was a powerful moment. Since then, more philanthropic organizations have come forward to sign and to join in the commitment. The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada will maintain the declaration as a living document that will continue to be read, discussed, and signed by others who wish to commit to the work of reconciliation.

### **Declaration of Action from the Philanthropic Community, presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, June 1, 2015**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has done a great service by focusing the attention of Canadians on the shared and ongoing impact of the Indian Residential School System. The participants and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have brought forward important truths of Canada's relationship with the Aboriginal peoples — the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, be they in urban, rural or remote locations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has provided a platform for Indian Residential School Survivors, as well as their descendants, to share their stories and experiences. It has given voice to those who were previously silenced, who had not been heard, listened to, or believed. These courageous Survivors have brought understanding and hope into the lives of those affected across generations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission process has also begun to map the direction to healing and reconciliation.

This historic process has provided both a place and a way for Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to learn and remember, to understand and acknowledge, as well as to participate and take action in supporting the healing and reconciliation so necessary for our country to become stronger and more inclusive for future generations.

Aboriginal peoples in Canada have contributed much, often willingly and freely, but too often without consent or choice. Yet they have persevered, demonstrated strength and resilience, and held faith that a better relationship is possible.

It falls on all people living in Canada to continue the hard work of healing and reconciliation, each in our own way and where possible, together, in our families and communities, in the organizations we work with and belong to, and as a nation. This is an important calling to which all of us are duty bound to respond.

Today we, the undersigned, come to you as a group from Canada's philanthropic community. We thank the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for inviting us into this circle that is built on the seven sacred lessons of: Truth, Humility, Honesty, Respect, Courage, Wisdom, and Love. These teachings are consistent with our collective purposes, principles and missions.

This is an opportune moment for Canada's philanthropic community to engage in and demonstrate leadership on reconciliation. We bring with us our networks, our voices, and our resources, along with new ways of thinking and doing to our work in areas such as: Inclusion, Culture and Language, Health, Housing, Education, Employment, and Environment.

We are committed to supporting the fulfillment of the vision of Aboriginal peoples, to building a fairer and more just country, and to the recommendations that will be outlined by the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We will work, each in our own way, and together, towards achieving the goal of reconciliation and, in the end, a much stronger, more inclusive Canada.

Therefore, here in this space made sacred through the sharing of the stories and experiences of the Survivors and their descendants, we bring our diversity and distinctiveness, our emerging vision of renewal, and our determination to ensure that the philanthropic community is engaged in the work of reconciliation.

We will:

### ***Learn and Remember by...***

1. Listening with respect, compassion and empathy while reaching out to those who have given voice to the tragedy that was the Indian Residential School System experience, understanding the cumulative impact of unresolved trauma passed from generation to generation as well as remembering the voices that were silenced; and
2. Engaging the philanthropic community in the dialogue necessary to ensure that we do this with, and not for, Aboriginal peoples in all their diversity.

### ***Understand and Acknowledge by...***

1. Learning about the history and legacy of the colonial system that imposed the Indian Residential School System that dispossessed and inflicted harm upon Aboriginal peoples and their cultures, so that we can understand how to work toward the reconciliation that is needed now and into the future; and
2. Recognizing the need for an ongoing commitment to support the continuation of this multi-generational journey of healing and reconciliation.

### ***Participate and Act by...***

1. Sharing our networks, our voices, and our resources to include and benefit Aboriginal peoples;
2. Committing to building relationships with Aboriginal peoples and extending the reach of our efforts in both policy and practice; and
3. Exploring new opportunities to support healing and reconciliation and the implementation of the spirit, intent, and content of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and recommendations.

### **Conclusion**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has set a path that will determine what reconciliation could look like in Canada, as well as how it may be achieved. We are honoured to participate, encouraged by the work that has been done, and emboldened to ensure that Aboriginal peoples' voices and needs remain an essential part of our work. We thank the Commissioners and the staff who have worked tirelessly to support the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and those who shared their stories, memories, and experiences. We place our Declaration of Action herewith to symbolize that this is concrete and will continue. Our signatures are a call to action inviting others to join in moving forward in an atmosphere of understanding, dignity, and respect towards the shared goal of reconciliation.

### **Signatory Organizations**

1. CEGN Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network
2. Cole Foundation
3. Community Foundation Grey Bruce
4. Community Foundation of Ottawa
5. Community Foundations of Canada
6. Fondation Écho / Echo Foundation
7. Inspirit Foundation
8. Laidlaw Foundation
9. Legacy of Hope
10. North Growth Foundation
11. Ontario Trillium Foundation
12. Panicaro Foundation
13. Pathy Family Foundation
14. Philanthropic Foundations Canada
15. RBC Foundation
16. Reconciliation Canada

17. Ryerson University Aboriginal Education Council
18. Samuel Family Foundation
19. Small Change Fund
20. Sprott Foundation
21. TD Bank Group
22. The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada
23. The Counselling Foundation of Canada
24. The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation
25. The Lawson Foundation
26. The Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative
27. The Molson Foundation
28. The Winnipeg Foundation
29. Suncor Energy Foundation
30. The Catherine Donnelly Foundation

For more information on the Declaration, click [here](#).