

Home / News / Canada

[Search](#)

# Residential Schools: Truth commission back on track after resignation

Survivors' stories lost due to delay

**Kathryn Blaze Carlson, National Post**  
Published: Sunday, December 13, 2009



Julie Oliver/Canwest News Service

Traditional dancer Thomas Clair takes part in the National Day of Reconciliation ceremony in Ottawa, Jun. 11, 2009. The event marked the first anniversary of Canada's apology for the Indian ...

The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission has missed the opportunity to speak with "quite a number of survivors" because of the high-profile resignation of its first chair last fall, the new chair said yesterday.

Justice Murray Sinclair, in a meeting with the National Post editorial board, said the October 2008 resignations of Justice Henry LaForme and two other commissioners have delayed the commission's work by an entire year, and this setback means some residential school victims will have passed on.

"That is a period of time for which we have lost the chance to get the stories of survivors, because the survivors are aging and dying off at very high rates," Justice Sinclair said. "There's no question about that."

Justice Sinclair and commissioners Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild were appointed in June 2009, months after Justice LaForme resigned citing an "incurable problem" that left the commission "on the verge of paralysis." In his letter to Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl, Justice LaForme said the commission "as currently constituted" will almost certainly fail.

"When we were appointed, we had to take the time to re-evaluate where the commission had evolved to, and basically had to deconstruct the commission

### More On This Story

- [Commission on residential schools starts 5-year probe](#)
- [Good residential school stories needed: lawyer](#)
- [Residential schools 'a sad chapter in our history,' Harper says](#)

### Related Topics

- [Henry LaForme](#)
  - [Murray Sinclair](#)
  - [Indigenous Issues](#)
  - [Special Interest Groups](#)
  - [Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)
- powered by **Inform**

### Story Tools

- [Change font size](#)
- [Comment on this story](#)
- [Print this story](#)
- [E-Mail this story](#)

### Share This Story

- [Facebook](#)
- [Digg](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [More](#)

Story tools presented by

altogether," Justice Sinclair told the editorial board. "As a result, we had to change the focus of our initial work, and we were set back because of that."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was born from the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and is mandated with documenting the legacy of one of Canada's darkest moments. But the commission got off to a shaky start, and was derailed after Justice LaForme said the two original commissioners "repeatedly and openly" rejected his authority and leadership.

Justice Sinclair said he and the new commissioners have since resolved the question of leadership, and agreed at the outset that they will "talk everything to death."

"Our commitment is to a consensus approach," he said, adding it is unclear whether the \$60-million budget will stretch the commission's full five-year term, or whether it will be capped at the original 2013 end-date. "When we have disagreements, we have to work things out."

The breakdown of the original commission was also pegged to interference by the Assembly of First Nations, which reportedly pushed the TRC to focus on telling the stories of survivors rather than on reconciliation. Justice LaForme is said to have quit once it was clear that the two commissioners shared the vision of the assembly's national chief, Phil Fontaine.

But Justice Sinclair said this, too, has been resolved.

"We're independent from the parties to the litigation," he said, referring to the Agreement, which lists the assembly as well as the Anglican, Catholic, United, and Presbyterian churches -- which ran residential schools and have since apologized -- as parties to the agreement. "We have the right not to accept their advice and direction, they don't have the right to interfere with us."

In the six months since its second launch, the TRC has met with residential school survivors from across the country, and is on track to issuing its mandated report by December 2011, the commissioners said.

The TRC's first national event is slated for next summer in Manitoba, and Justice Sinclair said he hopes it will bring together survivors, those who worked in the schools, and the government.

Meantime, he said the TRC will try to retrieve the stories lost because of the initial turmoil.

"We're looking at different ways to get those stories," he said. "There may be other people who were with them at the time who can tell us their story."

kcarlson@nationalpost.com

[FP's Stock Market Challenge is back! \\$60,000 in prizes. Register now for your chance to win](#)

Recent Comments

[View All](#)

**liquidpop**, Monday, Dec 14, 2009

I would like to know the name of this residential school you went to, where it was, who your teachers were. I can't find any information on co-race residential schools. The whole idea was to assimilate aboriginals. Finally, the fact that everything you have said is obviously peppered with complete fabrications, is appalling. You're obviously a fascist old woman, stuck in her ways, refusing to conform to the times. The world will be a better place when we're rid of your primitive ideologies.