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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Let me declare the meeting resumed.

Thank you, everybody, for showing up. This is our first meeting regarding Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation).

I want to thank our guests for being here today. We would like to thank Mr. Romeo Saganash for being here. From the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, we have Stephanie Scott, acting director; and Stephen Kakfwi, a governing circle member. Our third guest, Phyllis Webstad, is the executive director of the Orange Shirt Society and founder of Orange Shirt Day.

The way this normally works is that we give you five minutes to do an opening statement from each group, so that will be three opening statements. Following that, we have questions and comments from our members of Parliament for the duration of this hour. Since we started a few minutes late, we will extend the meeting by a few minutes to cover that.

First we have Mr. Saganash.

It's good to see you again, sir. You have five minutes, and we look forward to it. Go ahead.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (As an Individual): Thank you, Scott. It's a pleasure to see you again. I'll put on my timer because I don't want to go over my five minutes, as usual.

First of all, *meegwetch* to the committee for this kind invitation to appear before you. I also wish also to acknowledge the government for introducing Bill C-5. I think it's an important piece of legislation in moving forward in this country. I would like to express my deep gratitude as well to my former colleague Georgina Jolibois, who did some formidable work on this piece of legislation regarding reconciliation in this country.

I know this legislation only addresses one national day of truth and reconciliation, implementing, I believe, call to action 80, one of the important calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Let's not forget that there are 93 other calls to action that need to be implemented in this country if we wish to move forward on the path of reconciliation. I think it's important to remember that.

I understand that the government is also on the verge of introducing legislation regarding the United Nations Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is great. It's been promised since 2015. It's been a long time coming, but better late than never. I'm looking forward to seeing that piece of legislation in particular, since I had similar legislation not too long ago, Bill C-262, which finally died on the order paper in the Senate after being passed by Parliament.

Of course, UNDRIP legislation addresses calls to action 43 and 44; 44 is in regard to the action plan that's required to implement the UN declaration, and 43 calls on the federal government, the provinces, the territories and the municipalities to fully adopt and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. So we're looking forward to that.

Let's not forget there are at least 16 references to the United Nations declaration in the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I believe that not only legislation in this country needs to be consistent with the UN declaration, but our policies and our operational practices as well.

I see that my time is running out fast, but I wanted to make a couple of points here, one of them being that reconciliation was addressed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004 in the Haida Nation case, whereby the Supreme Court said that reconciliation is not an end in itself, but a process that we need to follow in this country, adding that the objective here—reconciliation—is to reconcile the pre-existing sovereignty of indigenous peoples with the assumed sovereignty of the Crown. I think it's important to remember that Supreme Court case.

If we are truly all in this together, I think we need to address all 94 calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I think that's an important point here.

Indigenous peoples' rights are human rights. Let's not forget that. There's an interesting principle in the 2014 Supreme Court decision, *Tsilhqot'in*, whereby the Supreme Court acknowledges that the charter provisions in part I of our Constitution and section 35 in part II of our Constitution are “sister provisions”—that's the expression used—that serve to limit the powers of the federal government and the provinces. It's important to remember that.

• (1210)

In closing, I think those who have no intention of upholding the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples always talk about how we should have patience, or how these things are too complicated and it's going to take time. But they aren't. Just to give you an example, the first modern treaty in this country, which has about 500 pages, took one year to negotiate. This treaty is the most complex and complicated document, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. It took one year to negotiate.

I'll just leave it at that, because my time is up. I'm looking forward to answering your questions, of course.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, my friend Romeo. I appreciate that.

Now we're going to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

Ms. Scott, do you want to split your time, or do you want to start first?

Ms. Stephanie Scott (Acting Director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation): I'm going to split my time with Stephen, please.

The Chair: Okay, please proceed.

Ms. Stephanie Scott: Good morning. My name is Stephanie Scott, and I'm the acting director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. I am joined today by Stephen Kakfwi, who is a member of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation governing circle.

First, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking to you from the original lands of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis nation.

I want to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for the invitation to appear in view of your study of Bill C-5.

At the outset, I would also like to note that we owe a debt of gratitude to Georgina Jolibois, who first introduced Bill C-369, in October 2017, to create a national day for truth and reconciliation. Although Bill C-369 died in the Senate, it provided an important opportunity for dialogue and reflection. As Georgina said, "After 151 years of pain and suffering inflicted on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, there will now be a time to reflect and to build relationships to strengthen the Canadian society."

I could not agree more. I spent five years at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and almost five years at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. As the manager of statement gathering at the commission, I had a unique opportunity to hear directly from survivors about their pain and suffering. My birth mother, who is in her sixties, says that she will never be the same because of the assimilation policies that took her away from the people she loved and the ones who loved her. May she find peace while she is still alive. To me, that's what reconciliation is all about.

My colleague Ry Moran appeared in front of this committee in 2018. At the time, Ry spoke about the TRC's examination of the place of residential schools in the history of this country, and he

stated that "the TRC was forced to conclude that there are no words for it other than 'cultural genocide'."

In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also concluded that there has been "a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples [that] has been empowered by colonial structures evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights".

I too am a Sixties Scoop survivor.

The international human rights legal framework requires Canada to provide redress for past harms caused to indigenous peoples, such as those described by the commission and the national inquiry. Redress can be individual or collective and may have material as well as symbolic components. Symbolic components, such as commemoration, are powerful medicine to bring comfort to survivors and keep the truth of their experiences in front of the nation.

This is why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 80 for a national day for truth and reconciliation is so important. Survivors and their families, and others affected by the residential school system, need a day for Canadians to acknowledge them and the history of human rights violations they have endured, while they are still living. The time to act is now.

In addition, we believe that the government must also implement the TRC's calls to action 81 and 82, which call for the federal, provincial and territorial governments, in collaboration with survivors, to establish monuments in capital cities across the country "to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities."

Canadians need to know the truth and understand what happened in order to foster true reconciliation and healing. Commemoration and education are critical to understand the complicated and difficult history that we share as indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians. We have seen time and time again what a difference education can make to the journey we are now all on together to reconcile our past and create a bright future for all of the generations to follow.

I would now like to turn the floor over to Mr. Kakfwi.

• (1215)

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi (Governing Circle Member, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation): Thank you. I should say good morning still.

I join you today from the original land of the Dene. I'm a member of the governing circle of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. I've been fortunate enough to have had many leadership roles, including serving as premier for the Northwest Territories and as president of the Dene Nation. I am also a survivor of residential schools. Most importantly, I'm a husband, a father and a grandfather.

In my lifetime, I focus on what can be accomplished when people work together, when we all engage in dialogue and form relationships based on understanding each other's life stories and commonalities as human beings. I would venture to say that a similar motivation is behind call to action 80. We are in this together, indigenous people and all Canadians, to work together co-operatively to build a better Canada. Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.

I would like to convey that we are very pleased with the suggested date of September 30 as the national day for truth and reconciliation. As a survivor, I have always found September to be a difficult month, for it is when September comes that we suffer periods of feeling empty and lonely. It is because it is tied to the season when we were taken away by force from our families and our community and brought to the residential schools.

September 30 is currently Orange Shirt Day. As all of you know, it was started by Phyllis Webstad, who had been given an orange shirt by her grandmother on her first day of residential school, but it was taken away from her upon her arrival. I see this national day for truth and reconciliation as building on truth, reconciliation and healing, as initiated by Orange Shirt Day.

This national day should not be seen as a holiday. Rather, it should be seen as a day of honouring and remembering, like Remembrance Day. It should be a day to remember those students who went to residential school, those who survived and those who did not. Just as, on Remembrance Day, we like to remember people who served in wars, it's important to have a day to remember and honour survivors, to end the month in a way that recasts the negative energy experienced at the beginning of the month and turns it into an event that is healing, an event that honours the history of survivors as well as their accomplishments and contributions, which they have achieved despite adversities faced.

Ms. Scott mentioned the TRC's calls to action 81 and 82, which call for the establishment of monuments in Ottawa and other capital cities across the country. These are critically important, as they would provide the Prime Minister, indigenous leaders, survivors and elders as well as others from across the country places to gather to hold ceremonial remembrance services. We are calling upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments to begin and to continue trying to create these significant monuments.

In closing, I'd like to emphasize that commemoration, as called for by the TRC's calls to action 80, 81 and 82, as well as the numerous calls to action regarding education, can help us forge a new partnership for the future. Establishing a national day for truth and reconciliation is a very important initiative. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to convey the voices of survivors to support the important work of the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kakfwi.

In your speech, in your introduction you mentioned Phyllis Webstad. Well, we're fortunate enough to have her with us today.

We go now to Ms. Webstad for a five-minute opening. Of course, Ms. Webstad is from the Orange Shirt Society.

Thank you for joining us. Please go ahead.

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: *Weyt-kp.* Good morning. Hello to everyone here today.

My name is Phyllis Webstad. I'm from the Canoe Creek and Dog Creek, Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation. I am coming to you today from Secwepemculecw, the land of the Shuswap people, in Williams Lake, B.C. Canoe Creek and Dog Creek are approximately an hour and a half southwest of Williams Lake.

Kukstemc. I thank you for the invitation to speak to Bill C-5, about a national day for truth and reconciliation. I am a third-generation Indian residential school survivor who attended the St. Joseph Indian residential school, also known as "the Mission", near Williams Lake. My grandmother attended for 10 years, along with her 10 children, including my mother for 10 years, and I attended for one year. My son was at the last operating residential school in Saskatchewan when it closed in 1996.

I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve until I was 10, and then went to live with my aunt when she finished university. When I turned six in July 1973, Granny took me to town to buy something to wear for my first day of school at the Mission. I chose a shiny new orange shirt. It was bright and exciting, just like I felt to be going to school for the first time. When I got to school, my shirt was taken away and I never wore it again.

It is my story of losing my shiny orange shirt purchased by my grandmother that has spread across Canada and beyond.

Orange Shirt Day was born out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission event held in Williams Lake, B.C., in May 2013, and as a result of Chief Commissioner Justice Sinclair challenging Canadians to keep the conversation happening after the TRC wrapped up. Our theme was "Remembering, recovering and reconciling". Our first nations, local government, schools and the RCMP all came together to hear the truth from residential school survivors. I was part of the planning for our TRC event, where I told my story of my orange shirt for the first time. We chose September because that was the time of year the children were taken away. We chose the 30th because it gives teachers and students time to settle in, to teach and learn, and time to plan an event.

At the TRC event in Vancouver, B.C., in mid-September 2013, before the first Orange Shirt Day, I overheard an elder say that September was crying month. I knew then that we had chosen the right day. September 30, Orange Shirt Day, is bringing awareness of the history of Indian residential schools and the impacts on the generations. It is a day to honour residential school survivors and their families and remember those who never made it.

What is forgotten is often repeated. Orange Shirt Day gives Canadians an opportunity to learn about, and to teach, the true history. This day acknowledges that what happened to us as children was horribly wrong, and that it will never happen again. Our slogan, “Every child matters,” began when I first told my story of my experience at residential school and how I felt that no one cared and that I didn’t matter.

Residential school survivors were children when they attended those schools. They all mattered, 150,000 of them. Every child matters in the past, the present and the future.

I have two books published telling of my orange shirt story, and I’m working on the third. The first is *The Orange Shirt Story*, available in English, French and Shuswap, for grade kindergarten and up. There is also curriculum and the poster available.

The second is *Phyllis’s Orange Shirt*. A lot of the illustrations are the same. The nuns and the crying were taken out. The book tells the same story, but rhymes, and is for ages four to six. It is available in English and French.

I am working on a third book, called *Beyond the Orange Shirt Story*, for grade 5 and up, which will tell more of my and my family’s truth.

• (1220)

The Orange Shirt Society was incorporated in July 2015 and opened an office in Williams Lake in April 2019, at which time I became its first staff member as executive director.

The three purposes of the Orange Shirt Society are these: one, to support Indian residential school reconciliation; two, to create awareness of the individual, family and community intergenerational impacts of Indian residential schools through Orange Shirt Society activities; and three, to create awareness of the concept of “Every child matters”.

Our web page is www.orangeshirtday.org. On our web page, we post educational resources from across Canada and we are continually adding as we become aware of resources being developed.

I notice that much of the discussion in the House of Commons was around the need to educate Canadians about the history of residential schools in Canada. I believe that a national statutory holiday, a national day for truth and reconciliation, can help accomplish this. I recommend that the federal government develop curriculum for teachers to use in preparing students for the statutory holiday and in learning the history behind it.

The Orange Shirt Society published a book this past summer called *Orange Shirt Day*. This is a textbook for grade 5 and up, as well as for adults. I suggest that this book be distributed to schools and into the hands of children across the country. It is obvious from the amount of racism still in this country that this education and the holiday are needed.

To finish, September 30, 2021, will be the eighth year of Orange Shirt Day and, I hope, the first day of a national day for truth and reconciliation. When I see people wearing an orange shirt or a pin, it’s like a little bit of justice for us survivors in our lifetime. One day there will be no survivors in Canada.

Honourable members, *kukstemic*. I thank you for your time today.

• (1225)

The Chair: Ms. Webstad, you have very little reason to be nervous. That was a fabulous presentation, and we thank you so very much.

May I ask you to repeat the website that you mentioned for information on the book?

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: It’s www.orangeshirtday.org.

The Chair: Thank you. I’ll repeat it again as we get closer to the end.

Right now we have questions and answers, open to any of our witnesses. I’d like to remind my colleagues to please address the person you’re directing the question to, as we are all present remotely here.

Also, witnesses, if you wish to get in on the conversation, feel free to put your hand close to the screen so that the person asking the question can see you, and you can do so that way.

In the meantime, we start with our six-minute round, the first round of questions.

Mr. Waugh, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank each and every one: Stephanie and Stephen, along with Romeo—it’s good to see you again—and certainly Phyllis.

Phyllis, I was honoured to be in the House of Commons this year. There is only a limited number of MPs in the House now because of COVID restrictions, but I was there in the House that day in September and proudly wore orange. I’ve read a couple of your books and I salute you. I am an MP from Saskatchewan. We should not forget, and you brought it up, that we had residential schools in this province less than 25 years ago, in 1996. This isn’t something that happened 50 or 60 years ago; it is still in the minds of many indigenous people in this province, and I want to thank you for bringing it up.

When I was on the indigenous committee, Truth and Reconciliation.... It’s a book that we should all have with us. When you all referenced calls to action 80, 81 and 82, I could flip to that today, and I would agree with most of this. I just want to say thank you for referencing the 94 calls to action. We’re looking today at number 80.

As some background, I’m a former school board trustee in Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan and then I got elected to the urban section of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. We did a lot of work from 2006 until 2015, and they’re still doing it, teaching about residential schools.

My question would maybe go to Stephanie and Stephen.

I'm frustrated. When I became an MP in Ottawa in 2015-16, when I looked around for an education minister, there was none, yet the federal government hands over millions and millions of dollars to schools on federal reserves. As the Saskatchewan School Boards, and I'm sure it's the same in every province, we do curricula, and yet we never reach out to the federal responsibility of reserves. We're not connecting. We do a good job in Saskatchewan, urban and rural, but we just don't connect with the residential schools on reserves and what they are teaching.

Could somebody talk about that? It's a federal government responsibility, and yet, as provincial school board trustees, we never wanted to go there, and we need to.

Maybe if you don't mind, Stephanie, talk about that, because I have been at your national centre in Winnipeg.

• (1230)

Ms. Stephanie Scott: Thank you.

I just want to stress that education must take place in the classroom. This September 30, through the generous support of Canada and its partners, Phyllis Webstad joined us. We held an online event titled "Every Child Matters: Reconciliation through Education". It was 90 minutes of visual education content regarding residential school systems, films of indigenous culture and life experiences mainly told through the eyes of first nations, Inuit and Métis people.

Almost 10,000 teachers and about 500,000 of their students registered to participate. This was right through the country, right across Canada. We watched the programming to mark Orange Shirt Day, and millions of additional Canadians viewed the content online and broadcast through the CBC and soon on APTN.

We also publish educational materials in regard to reconciliation with Canada's history directed at teachers in grades five to 12. We thought 50,000 copies were going to be enough, but they weren't. There was an overwhelming response and request for print material. In total, we delivered 160,000 copies to students, families and teachers in schools across this land, including first nations communities. Thousands of downloads also took place online. To me, this demonstrates a hunger and a need for educational materials in all mediums in regard to residential schools and truth and reconciliation.

September 30 is a day for families to remember and come together at gathering places and monuments to learn more about the true history of Canada, and we did work with our partner, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, which works on reserve. They joined us all along the way, and we're really thankful that the government helped to support this event. It was so successful and so important. Phyllis spoke, and we taught almost half a million students across this country.

There is a need both in urban and first nations communities. It's really great that our people are able to share that story and to tell it from our perspectives to make a change in this country.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

I'm glad you mentioned....

Go ahead, Stephen.

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi: Can I add something very briefly?

Here in the Northwest Territories there are just public schools. We don't have any reserves. What's good for the settler Canadians has to be good for the Inuvialuit, the Métis and the Dene.

A few years ago, we decided it was going to be mandatory for high school students, in order to graduate, to take a northern studies course, which is a course to study the geography and the different peoples of the Northwest Territories. There was a huge protest about it, but we held firm. It's with amazing pride that so many people can say they know who the Inuvialuit are because they took this course—especially those raised in Yellowknife who never get a chance to go outside the city boundaries to an Inuvialuit, a Gwich'in, Sauleaux, Tlicho or Dehcho community.

From there, we went into adding the history and legacy of residential schools. That is also going to be mandatory. You can take it in Grade 10, 11 or 12, but you have to take it. First we teach about getting to know the indigenous people and then about what happened to them.

It has worked well for us. It's supported by everyone. I think everybody realized that the children, the high school students and the university students who leave the north to go to Dalhousie, McGill and all the universities and schools across the country, have come back and said they were really proud to be able to say they're from Yellowknife and that they know who the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in and Tlicho are.

There's tremendous pride that comes from it because there are actually people.... There was one member of the legislature who was elected a few years ago who admitted he had never been outside the boundaries of Yellowknife. He had never visited any community other than Yellowknife, and here he was, given the power to vote on legislation, to allocate budgets and vote on money for 33 other communities of which he knew absolutely nothing. So this was—

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kakfwi. I'm sorry to do that. I have to move on. Our time is up with that question.

We now turn to Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Ms. Scott, Mr. Kakfwi, Mr. Saganash and Ms. Webstad. You can hear it in my voice. I think I'm nervous too. This is quite emotional for me. I'm joining you here in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and Neutral people. I'm honoured to be here today.

I'm newly elected—only a year. I was doing my best to reach out to students in different schools, from high schools down to the grade schools. When the pandemic hit, we had to stop visiting. It was one of the most treasured things I did. Not that long ago, in the fall, a school reached out to me. It was absolutely amazing. Forest Glen Public School in Wilmot reached out to me. The students of Ms. Teske, Mr. Rumble and Ms. Kleinschuck reached out to me and asked if I was, as an elected official, aware of Orange Shirt Day. Did I know about this? They asked how they could make a difference.

I was honoured. I joined them for a virtual meeting with three grade 7s. I thanked them for taking the initiative to reach out to their elected official. I said that I will see what I can do. Never in my wildest dreams would I realize that I would be talking to Ms. Webstad herself.

If I may ask you, Ms. Webstad, what message can I bring back to those students who took the time to reach out? Hopefully there are many others across the country, especially if education can help us bring awareness. We can start with those younger generations. They are naturally inclined to want to reach out and help.

What message can you give to those young students who took the time and had the know-how to reach out to their elected officials about how they can make a difference?

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: It depends on the age of the children and the grade. My presentations differ, depending on the age group, but one thing that I always thank them for is caring about what happened to us and learning the history and having empathy for our experiences. Children are amazing. They understand more than I would ever have given them credit for. At that age, the younger age, they're just upset that somebody took my shirt. How dare they take my shirt? They have the empathy.

As they grow older and into the high schools.... As somebody said before, this wasn't 100 years ago, and all survivors aren't dead and gone. We're still here. When I would be introduced in school assemblies when I did my tour across Canada last year, paid by Canadian Heritage, I would be introduced as "the real Phyllis Webstad" to let them know that this was recent history and that survivors are still here and to encourage them to know the land they're on and if there are survivors in the area, to ask them, and even their families, if they're okay to speak. There are intergenerational impacts.

Thank you for that question.

Mr. Tim Louis: I will bring those suggestions back to them.

In this case, with Forest Glen, they were in grade 7, in three classrooms in a virtual setting, and I have to say that it was one of the most mature conversations I've ever had. I think a holiday like this will really cement the need to make these changes and to move forward. I very much appreciate it.

I have time for one more quick question, maybe, for Ms. Scott.

We mentioned the balance between celebrating culture on the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation with that national day of mourning. You want to look back and recognize, but at the same time you also want to look forward. What can we learn from you about that balance? How can we strike that balance?

• (1240)

Ms. Stephanie Scott: I think it's been almost five years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission closed its doors, and there's still a lot of work to be done towards reconciliation and many calls to action that still need to be completed.

When I talk about the balance...I think my mother-in-law was also taken to her first residential school at the age of seven. She wishes for a day to remember the students' and their families' resiliency. She took a bad situation, being in residential school, and she turned it around. Recently she completed her Ph.D., and she's in her seventies. I have much respect for her. She took back her power. She wants all Canadians to know the assimilation policies did not kill her, and she speaks about that often.

As an intergenerational survivor, I see this day as a time for my children and grandchildren to lay tobacco, pray and remember all survivors and the parents who were left behind. We must never forget the thousands of children who died or did not return from the schools. During the TRC, a great many survivors, and the parents of former students, spoke of the children who went to school and never came home. It is unbelievable that some parents who passed on to the spirit world or who are alive today do not know where their children are buried, sometimes even thousands of miles away.

The NCTR will continue to find the truth of what happened to the children of residential schools through an exhaustive review of the residential school records that we hold in the archive, and I think it's important that we have places to gather and to come together and to respect, honour and remember those who have gone before us and for the future generations to learn.

Mr. Tim Louis: I thank you very much.

I'd love to ask more questions, but I want to give more people time.

I just wanted to add one quick thing.

Mr. Saganash, I wish I had time to talk to you. I wasn't in the House of Commons, but when I heard you speak, it was one of the most emotional moments of my life, so thank you for sharing that. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Louis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

As Mr. Louis said, this is an emotional occasion, not to mention very significant and symbolic. That is a good segue into my first question, which is for Mr. Saganash.

As far as indigenous issues go, would you say modest progress of a symbolic nature comes fairly easy, so to speak? Why is it so hard for government after government to take meaningful action, without it being so complicated?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That is a very good question. I have been pondering that for the past 40 years. Believe it or not, I have been at this 40 years; that is how long I have been championing these issues.

One of the biggest problems is that we all want the same things, land and resources. I want to protect my land and my resources, but others want to appropriate them. That's the problem we come up against in this country. It is not for nothing that we keep running into the same problems in Canada, whether we are talking about Caledonia, Kanesatake, the Wet'suwet'en community, the Mi'kmaq community, the Anishinabe community in the La Vérendrye wildlife reserve, in Quebec, the Atikamekw community or the Innu community. By the way, the Atikamekw and the Innu have been "negotiating" for nearly 40 years. Both communities have been negotiating with the two levels of government—provincial and federal—since 1982. To date, nothing has been settled. All that time, development has continued on their land. I call that bad faith.

The challenges we face are tremendous, and others will emerge as situations turn critical all over the country. Martin Luther King said,

[English]

"There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over."

[Translation]

In other words, our patience, too, has its limits. Those in the new generation are more aware of their fundamental rights in this country. They are more educated, and I worry they will not be as patient as we are. They certainly aren't as patient as I am, after 40 years.

• (1245)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I see that the history of residential schools and education will play an important role.

I will now turn to Mr. Kakfwi.

You said September 30 should not be a holiday, but a day to honour and remember. The day will no doubt be used for the right purpose, but I would like to know what should be done to honour residential school survivors and raise awareness among not only indigenous youth, but also the population as a whole. This national day was established, yes, but how will it be used meaningfully?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi: Thank you.

These terms are a bit legal, I guess. If a legal definition of "holiday" constitutes a day set aside in Canada to do something special, then we have to hang on to the word "holiday". I just don't like the connotation of it in layman's terms. It should be a memorial day, a day to commemorate, a day to remember, not a day to stay home, put our feet up and watch TV. That was the point I was making.

September 30 should be set aside if a legal term, a parliamentary term, is to make it another holiday along with the list of the others, and we should go with that. I'm just saying I don't want people to think, "We have another holiday. That's great."

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

Ms. Webstad, I would be remiss if I let this short period of questions end without thanking you for everything you have done on this issue.

You said something I think is very important—if your story was not taught or passed on, it could happen again. That is absolutely true.

You already have the tools to educate people on the history of residential schools, and I hope you use them to reach the widest possible audience. I urge you to make sure that education is available not just to young indigenous people, but also to all young Canadians and Quebecers—who need to know the history of residential schools and indigenous history overall.

I actually don't have a question for you. I just want to thank you and say that if you ever have trouble getting your message out to provincial ministries of education, you can count on us. We will definitely be there to lend a helping hand.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Now we go to Ms. McPherson for six minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to echo my colleagues to thank all of our guests who are joining us today. This has been wonderful, and it is such an honour.

To hear Ms. Webstad speak about feeling nervous and uncomfortable presenting is unbelievable. It's such an honour to have you here, Ms. Webstad. Thank you so much for sharing with us.

I have some questions for you, but I think I'm going to first ask a question of Mr. Saganash, somebody who is a survivor of residential schools as well.

I want to talk to you to follow up on what my colleague MP Champoux talked about. While I believe that the day of reconciliation is a vital step, it seems like a relatively simple piece of legislation. I'm wondering what, from your perspective, you would like to see us move on among those calls for action that would require a bit more effort, a little bit more time.

You spoke of the 16 calls for action implicated by UNDRIP. Perhaps you could talk about those things you'd really like to see the government move on next among those 94 calls.

• (1250)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you for that question, Heather. I think it's an important one.

Above and beyond what we are intending to achieve with this piece of legislation, Bill C-5, the other important piece still missing, in my view, is the legislation on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that would implement calls to action 43 and 44 in particular.

Bill C-262, which died in the Senate, as I mentioned, was perhaps the most important piece of legislation that the Parliament of Canada had considered to that point. I think we need to renew the effort to adopt legislation to implement those calls to action, 43 and 44 in particular.

The United Nations has considered the rights of indigenous peoples as human rights for the past three decades. I recall that when we voted on Bill C-262 in the previous parliament, there were still members of that parliament who voted against Bill C-262, thereby voting against the very fundamental human rights of the first peoples of this country. I still remember that, and I cannot grasp how, in 2020, in one of the richest countries in the world, we can still have members of Parliament voting against human rights. It's just beyond me.

I think that bill needs to be adopted in this present parliament. I know these are difficult times right now—trying times, at this moment—but if we want to move forward on the path of reconciliation, I think that fully adopting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be a huge step.

B.C. has done it, and the sky hasn't fallen. I think that's the path we need to choose, moving forward.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you so much.

It is certainly a deep stain on this country that we have not been able to pass the legislation yet. Thank you, and of course MP Jolibois, for all the work you've done on this.

I'm a mother, and on September 30 my children and I wear our orange shirts. I'm also a teacher by training, so I'm very interested in some of the comments I've heard so far concerning how we ensure that students learn that this is part of our curriculum, part of our classes.

Maybe I'll start by asking Ms. Webstad this question.

I wanted to show a book I have been reading, which I read to classes and which is also written partly in Cree, called *Stolen Words*. Knowing that this is so important, and knowing that re-

sources have been developed that we can implement around the country and that we can use this day as one of the moments for doing so, how do you see us working through the fact that the education curriculum is mandated within provinces, and that not all provinces are going to be as open to this discussion as others?

Ms. Webstad, could you comment on that? Then I may pass the question over to Ms. Scott as well.

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: From 2013, when Orange Shirt Day first started, I've noticed that it's getting better, and it will continue to get better. By “better”, I mean teachers are more aware.

In 2013 and especially in 2014, I would get emails from teachers across Canada wanting to know: “How do I teach this? What do I do? Where do I go? What do I need? What do I need to know? What if I do it wrong?” I didn't have answers for them.

I have in my files a kit that I would send to teachers. I'm not a teacher. My education is accounting and bookkeeping. I'm used to being in my corner doing my books, so I just gathered stuff. One of the big ones was Manitoba. I would share the link to the Manitoba resources for teachers to look at.

Across Canada it's getting better and better. More provinces are having curriculum and developing curriculum. Whenever we hear about it, we post it on our web page. Now my response to emails is to please check our resources on our page. Also, I encourage any teachers who have curriculum and are willing to share it to post it on our page.

I'm not sure if that answered your question—

• (1255)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: —but that's been what I've been doing personally and—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I will say that I will share that.

The Chair: Thank you—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm out of time, aren't I?

The Chair: Do you want to finish that thought, Ms. McPherson?

Ms. Heather McPherson: I was just going to just let you know that in Alberta—and I know you probably are aware—there is a proposal to take residential school education out of our curriculum, so I will make sure that I share your resources as widely as I can to educators in the province.

The Chair: Thank you, folks.

We have to move on to the next question.

Mr. Shields, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you.

I'll be sharing my time with MP Aitchison.

To the premier of the Northwest Territories, I've had the privilege of going to your assembly building. It wasn't designed in the way we did ours, with the two sort of separated; it's in a circle. I have an idea that you probably were involved in setting that up.

You referenced call to action number 80 in the building of relationships. As I look at your comments about "a holiday", you know, if I thought all federal employees were out building relationships on that day, that might be a great idea; but I think we have a problem here.

How would you go about saying, "Okay, federal employees, how do we build relationships?" You refer to that, and I know from your background that it's probably what you really strongly work at.

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi: In the Northwest Territories, there are 40,000 people, and we split about a third of a million square miles. Originally we were one and a half million square miles, and then we divided and created Nunavut.

The country is diverse, and we operate on a consensus system. Most elected leaders know what it takes to reach an agreement. That gives us a good footing to accommodate each other's interests and show the kind of respect and dialogue that it takes to make this a home for everybody.

In the north here, one of the things we do, for instance, is we orient teachers. Every fall new teachers come into the north. Before they disperse into the communities, they spend at least two days getting oriented. I'm one of the speakers who gets invited to speak to them about who I am, where my people are, some of the history I have and my experiences in residential school.

They then go into the communities already knowing a little bit about the history we have had, and it changes everything about what we do. Then they are truly interested in learning more.

The curriculum right now is being changed to add many more videos, books and testimonials from residential school survivors.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

I would agree that maybe that's what our federal employees should be doing on September 30. There should be more of a structured approach for our federal employees, rather than, as you suggested, sitting at home watching TV. Unless we do that and unless there's a structured move, I don't think we're going to do number 80 that you're talking about in building relationships.

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi: Every year I watch and take part in Remembrance Day because my wife's family and some of my distant relatives did serve in the war. I understand world history and the terrible wars that the world has been in. I believe that we have to provide ceremonies and Remembrance Day activities to remember that so that we don't forget. I think we can do the same.

We need the federal government to finish working on the creation of a national monument in Ottawa, so that every September 30 the prime minister, the members of Parliament and the senators can go to this monument that we're going to create. The process had started, and then it got sidelined about a year ago. We can televise this across Canada, and it will force the parents of every child who sees that on TV.... They'll ask, "Mom, Dad, what is that all about?"

How come you never talked to me about this? I didn't know there were indigenous people. Who are they? What happened to them?"

That's going to create the dialogue, but we need some help. There's supposed to be one national monument created in Ottawa, and then one in each of the provinces and territories. We need to do that.

We also need the minister to finish creating the national council for truth and reconciliation. Aside from the U.N. declaration being adopted by Canada, the creation of a national council for reconciliation is also paramount, because that is the council that is going to take the country to task on an annual basis. Just as the Auditor General does for the accounting of our money, we also need this national council for reconciliation to take the governments, the churches, the provinces, the cities, the towns and the schools across this country to task on a yearly basis on the progress—or lack of it—towards reconciliation.

● (1300)

The Chair: I apologize. I hate to interrupt, but I only have 20 seconds for Mr. Aitchison.

If you have a quick question, sir, please go ahead, but I have to make this very quick.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): I have a lot of questions, but there's not enough time, so maybe what I'll do.... We have contact information for each of these remarkable witnesses, and I need to learn more. I want to thank you so much for what you said to us today.

Ms. Webstad, I just recently purchased a whole bunch of books for all of the elementary schools in my riding on International Day of the Girl. I think I'm going to buy one of your books for every single school in my riding as well. I'd like to talk to you about doing an event virtually, maybe, where we give those books out.

I'm really quite moved by what I've heard today. I'll need to talk to you more, away from this constrained format.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison. At the risk of sounding like a biased chair, well said.

Now we're going to Mr. Housefather for five minutes, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much to this distinguished and wonderful panel of witnesses. Mr. Saganash, it's great to see you again. It's great to hear from the others.

The stories you told were incredibly moving. Like all of my colleagues from all parties, I'm full of contrition for the residential school experience that so many indigenous people in this country experienced. There's no way of absolutely making amends, but one way of doing it is making sure that all Canadians—especially when survivors are gone—know the history of this day and why we have caused it to happen.

That doesn't mean that there's not much more work to be done in terms of police brutality against indigenous people, the overincarceration rates of indigenous people, implementing the rest of the recommendations of this report and implementing treaties as we should.

I'm going to stick to the bill itself, but just understand that in the framework of my questions on the bill, I'm not saying that there's not so many other things we still need to do.

I would like to ask each of the witnesses to let me know if there any amendments to this bill that you think should be made by this committee.

I'd like to start with Ms. Scott. Are there any amendments to the bill that your association sees as necessary?

• (1305)

Ms. Stephanie Scott: Upon review, we didn't have any further comments or changes to the bill moving forward. We hope that it passes and receives royal assent.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Ms. Webstad, would you comment?

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: No, we haven't come up with any changes. It's good the way it is.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Mr. Saganash, would you comment?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: The bill is pretty straightforward, in my view. I'm glad, however—and I need to mention this—that the word “truth” also is included in the bill, so it's “truth and reconciliation”. I think they go together, and I'm happy to see that both words are included.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Given that there are no changes recommended to the bill, I'm going to move to the other question, and I probably only have a chance to ask one of you. I think it has kind of been answered by Ms. Scott already.

Ms. Webstad, in terms of educating people on the reasons we're adopting this day, I also read your books with great attention. I really appreciate the fact that you wrote them for children. Other than making sure that we get the monument completed and providing the education that you see we should be providing for commemorating this day, is there anything else we should be doing on this day? There are public education campaigns, particularly for schools, and a monument that members of Parliament and other people in Ottawa can go to. Is there anything else you would offer that the government should be looking to in terms of commemorating this day?

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: I'm glad you asked that, because I had my hand up to talk.

One of the things I always say when I speak about this statutory holiday is that the concern is having a day off to “put your feet up”, as Stephen said, but I encourage the federal government workers and indigenous people—who get the day off because they're federal—to find an Orange Shirt Day event, since they're all across

Canada, and volunteer to set up chairs, take down chairs, help an elder, hand out water, or show up with your smudge bowl. Do whatever you can do, but get out of the house and get to an event.

This isn't a federal suggestion, but I just want to throw it in there. I and another person are working with the Niagara Falls illumination committee. This year Niagara Falls was lit up for 15 minutes, one minute per 10,000 of the 150,000 children, and I want to get the information out to Canadians that we're working on getting this happening on the U.S. and the Canadian sides at a specific time every year. I'm suggesting 8 a.m. Ontario time, so it would be 5 a.m. B.C. time. Families can stand out wherever they are and say out loud their families' names so that those 150,000 names are being said.

I plan to be in Niagara Falls in September of 2022 and I invite you all to be there.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's phenomenal, and I'm going to close by saying that hopefully all members of Parliament will organize events in their ridings to complete that day. I think it's important for all of us, and of course I hope the provinces will also get involved in recognizing the holiday.

I see Mr. Kakfwi wanted to say something, so I'll close and yield my time so Mr. Kakfwi can finish.

The Chair: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Stephen Kakfwi: Thank you.

The work that needs to be done is not just with non-indigenous Canadians. Part of the work is with indigenous people as well, with indigenous families. As an example, it's only about four years now since I found out that some of my mother's relatives were in residential school from 1860 on. For over 130 years my family was in residential schools, and it was only when my mother turned 80 that she finally told us that the reason she never talks about her childhood is that she didn't have any. She spent almost 10 years in a residential school, and she only told us when she was 80 years old.

We still don't know very much about what she went through, but there's so much learning and healing to be done within our own communities. We need, as indigenous people, to mark and commemorate, and to heal together as well. It's not just non-indigenous people who need to engage, although we need that; the greatest healing that needs to be done is within the families of residential school survivors.

• (1310)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kakfwi, for a very good note to end this meeting. Unfortunately we don't have more time, but fortunately it was a good meeting, and I want to thank you all for doing it.

I want to thank Romeo Saganash, our dear friend, who joins us. I want to thank acting director Stephanie Scott from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, as well as governing circle member Stephen Kakfwi. Of course we especially want to thank Phyllis Webstad from the Orange Shirt Society, executive director and proud founder of Orange Shirt Day, for her insight.

One more time, Ms. Webstad: What's that website again?

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: It's orangeshirtday.org.

The Chair: Thank you all. We have to end it there. Again, I appreciate everything you've brought to us today. This has been a very good session.

The meeting is adjourned.

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