

Sacred Responsibility:

Searching for the Missing
Children and Unmarked Burials

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Interim Report Summary



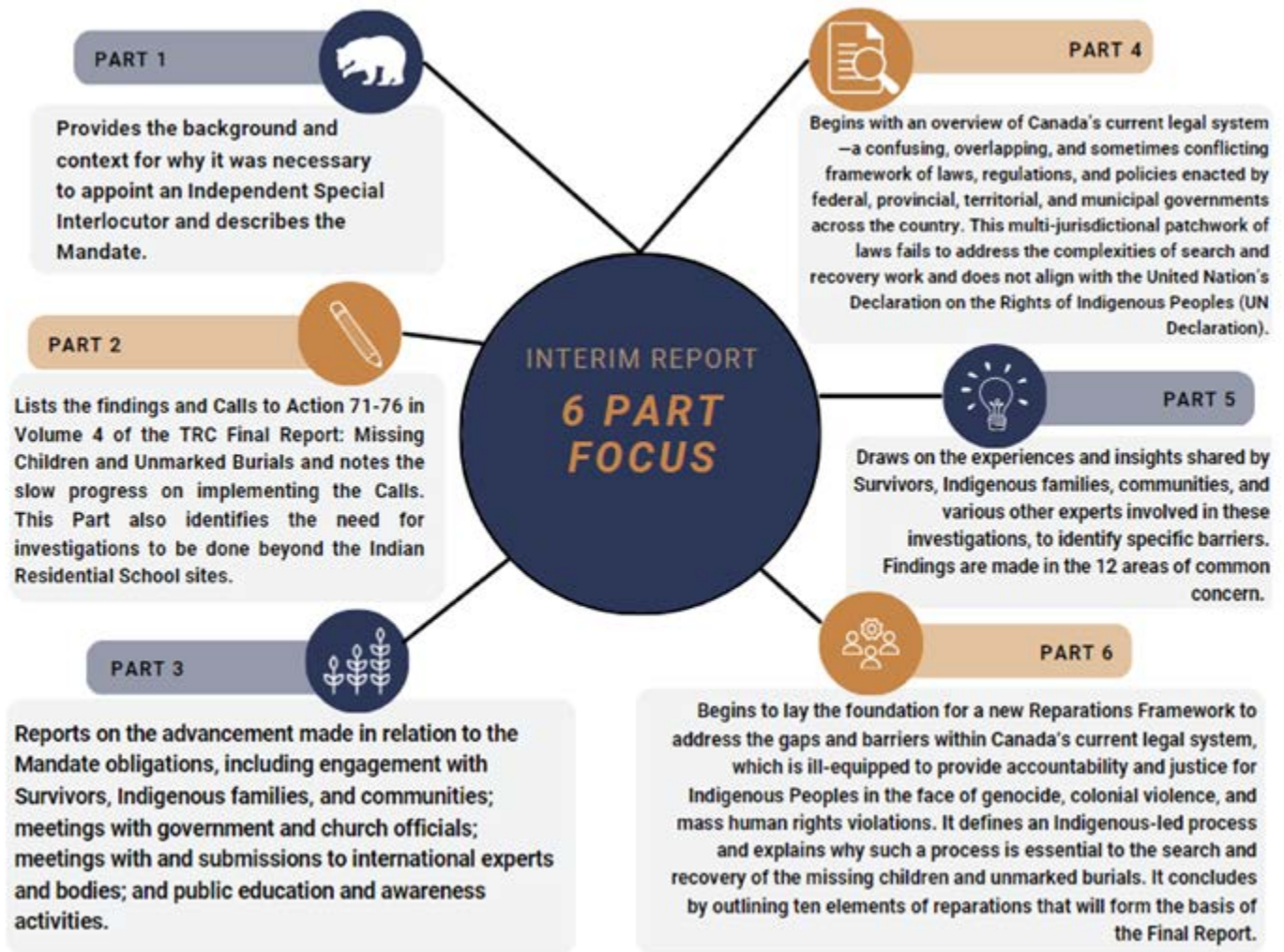
Independent
Special Interlocutor

June 2023

What is this report?

This Interim Report examines the current Canadian legal framework and identifies significant limitations and gaps that create barriers for Survivors, Indigenous families, and communities as they lead search and recovery efforts to find the missing children and unmarked burials.

The Report has Six Parts:



Summaries are included throughout to illustrate the barriers communities are facing as well as emerging Indigenous-led practices that have been applied to advance search and recovery work in accordance with Indigenous laws and protocols.

What common concerns are identified in the report?

The Sacred work that Survivors and Indigenous communities are leading to recover the children who were never returned home from Indian Residential Schools has revealed an urgent need for legislative, regulatory, and policy protections of former Indian Residential School sites and other associated sites. There are likely unmarked burials associated with every former Indian Residential School site across Canada, including both the Indian Residential Schools that are included in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and those that were not recognized under that Agreement. In addition, there are many associated sites that need to be searched since children were forcibly transferred to other places from Indian Residential Schools, including hospitals, Indian hospitals, sanatoria, cemeteries, reformatories, and industrial schools.

48 Findings are made in 12 areas of common concern:



Throughout the Mandate, the Independent Special Interlocutor has prioritized meeting with Survivors, Indigenous families and communities, including travelling to meet them within their own territories and attending the sites where search and recovery efforts are ongoing, when requested by the Survivors and leadership. In addition, she has delivered numerous presentations to Indigenous leadership, communities and organizations, including at National and Provincial Annual General Meetings and Assemblies, and at community Gatherings focused on the search and recovery of unmarked burials and missing children. Over the last year, the Independent Special Interlocutor has also engaged in liaison activities, including assisting Survivors and Indigenous families locate records that provide information about their missing loved ones.

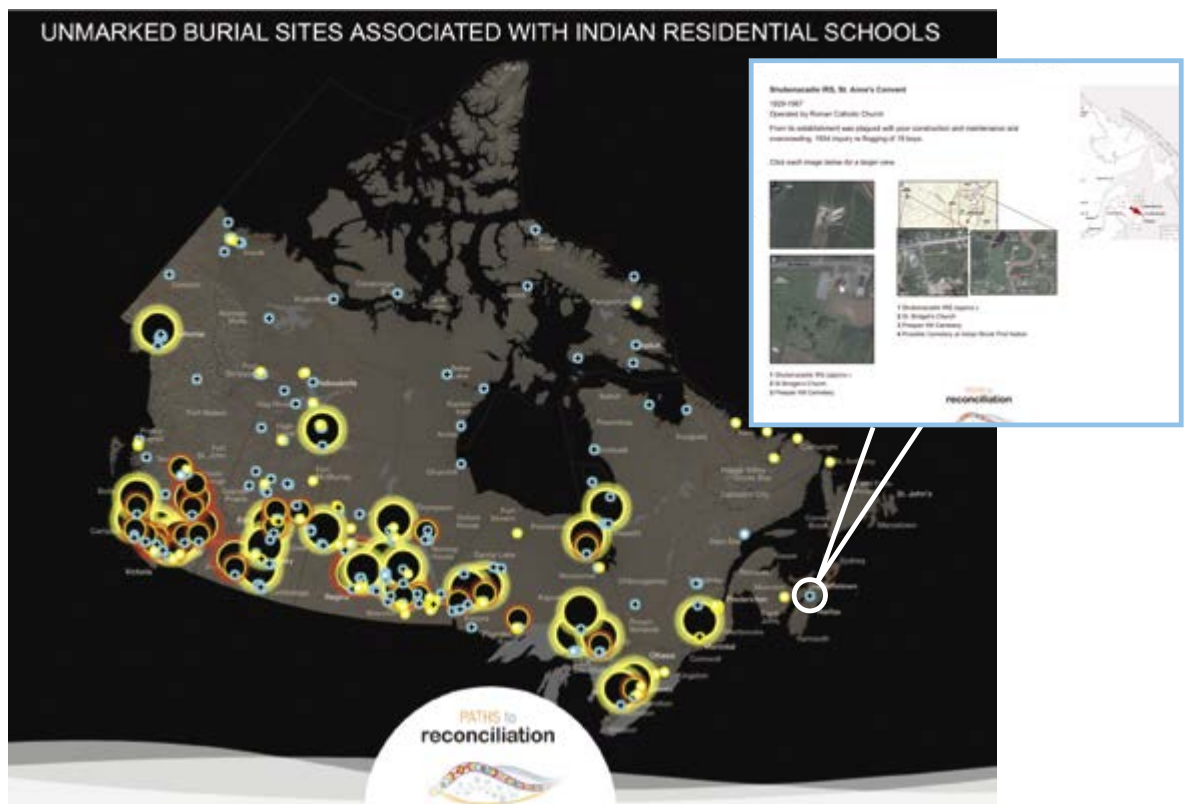
In the first year of the Mandate, four National Gatherings on Unmarked Burials were held



Future National Gatherings are being planned in Montreal on September 6-8, 2023, and one in the far north, the date and location yet to be determined and finalized.

The Independent Special Interlocutor has also had meetings with government and church representatives and appeared in person before the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples in March 2023. In addition, Submissions were made to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Expert Mechanisms on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Both submissions are available on the [OSI website](#).

Public education and awareness activities, including the establishment of a partnership with Canadian Geographic to create a publicly available [interactive map](#) of unmarked burial sites, were done.



Why was the report released in Cowessess First Nation?

In 2021, Cowessess First Nation announced the recovery of 751 unmarked graves. Because this Sacred work is being done within Indigenous territories, it was important to release the Interim Report in the presence of Survivors and community members. Cowessess was hosting a Survivor Gathering, and the Independent Special Interlocutor was invited to attend and learn from those leading search and recovery work in Saskatchewan. Cowessess is one of several communities that has moved this Sacred work forward nationally and continues to generously share their experiences with other Indigenous communities leading search and recovery work.

Forced transfers of Indigenous children

Over the past year, discussions with Survivors, Indigenous families, and communities leading search and recovery work have made it clear that it is necessary to trace the movement of each missing child, from when they were first taken to an Indian Residential School through to any other institution or location where they were subsequently sent. Only by following the forced transfer of each child from Indian Residential Schools to other associated institutions can the full truth about their experiences, the conditions leading to their deaths and the location of their burial sites be determined.



The ongoing challenges to collecting records

The Interim Report outlines that there are many different records that may contain information about the missing children and where they may be buried. These records are held by various record holders, including federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, universities, medical institutions and other entities. Privacy and access to information laws may apply and restrict access to records that may contain vital information that can reveal the identity of a missing child or the location of an unmarked burial. There are also variable responses by institutions to requests for records – some record holders have been responsive to record requests while others have deliberately blocked access.

What are the next step for the Independent Special Interlocutor?

In the coming year, the Independent Special Interlocutor will continue to listen to, and learn from Survivors, Indigenous families and communities. She will remember to be a voice for the missing children. She will continue to prioritize meeting with and hearing from Indigenous communities about how to create a new legal framework that is governed by Indigenous law and aligns with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and hear from Survivors and communities what they would like to see included in a new Reparations Framework.

Will the final report be ready for release at the end of the two-year Mandate in June 2024?

Yes, the Independent Special Interlocutor plans to have the Final Report released in June 2024 at a public event in Ottawa. Survivors, Indigenous families and communities have waited too long for action to be taken. It has already been eight years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada delivered its Final Report. Calls to Action 71 to 76 provide clear direction for all levels of government to support this Sacred work. The Independent Special Interlocutor, will not contribute further to this delay.





**Independent
Special Interlocutor**

for Missing Children and Unmarked
Graves and Burial Sites associated
with Indian Residential Schools

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