Letters from the Law Commission of Canada

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The Canada geese are well aware we've reached mid-October. Here in Ottawa, if we keep our ears open, we know exactly when they're passing overhead on their long journey south. They call us to look up and watch them fly away in V-formation. They invite us through their sense of order and rhythm and collective purpose to reflect upon and value the connection of living beings to each other and to their always changing world.

The month of October begins on the heels of the 30th of September, a day to mark shared commitment to truth and reconciliation across this country. The orange shirts associated with the last day of September share their bright "notice me" colour with the maple leaves and pumpkins that mark the steady rolling in of autumn. Together with the geese, they all contribute to the cyclical feel and character of our Canadian calendar. The fact that we pause for Thanksgiving before we get too far along in October underscores our gratitude for the beauty of nature, the richness of the harvest and the powerful potential of collective movement and direction.

This October marked the first "listen and learn roundtable" organized by the Law Commission of Canada to facilitate and encourage the sharing of ideas about law-related challenges today and on the horizon. As leader of our small but growing LCC team, I hope that these roundtables – the organization of which is still in its very early stages – will offer us opportunities to hear from people keen to share their ideas and projects. Around the table in this first get-together in Toronto, participants suggested exploration of new paths across a spectrum of issues relevant to the lives of Canadians. Those issues included fairness in conflict resolution procedures and evolving contours of corporate responsibility, review of sentencing and assessment of legal frameworks for immigration, quickly changing relationships with artificial intelligence and legal regulation of adaptation to climate change.

The range of areas calling for close examination, innovative thinking and wide-ranging ambition is striking. People, including and beyond the contributors to our roundtable exchanges, are already devoting time and energy to all of them. This fall and beyond, the Law Commission will be in listening mode, learning where and how to invest its own time and energy. We are keen to figure out who and what are calling out "notice me" - even if they're not coloured bright orange and don't honk aloud in the sky to signal their presence. And we give thanks for the individuals and projects dedicated to the never-ending hard work of responding to law and justice related needs.

Autumnal maple leaves.

Characterized by changing leaf colours and the celebration of Thanksgiving, mid-October is also home to "World Play Day". Whether or not you've heard of it, let alone marked it, its meaning and significance are clear. Play is important enough to warrant special attention: ensuring space for play for young people and even for the not-so-young is crucial to human health, flourishing, and cooperation. This may sound far removed from the vocation of a Law Commission, but it's not. Just like play, engagement with change in and through law includes serious learning, collaborating, experimenting and imagination. Just like law reform, play offers a space for the intertwining of energy, creativity, and movement.

In the middle of this particular October, tragically and traumatically marked by brutal terrorism and the agony of war, it may feel difficult to focus on law reform projects, believe in the power and potential of reconciliation, or take joy in playing in the leaves. But the co-existence of all these things illustrates the fragility and the strength of our communities, institutions, and humanity. It is hard work to hold onto hope, learn from each other, reinforce foundations for justice, and take solid steps forward for change. But that is the task – as inexorable and awe-inspiring as the change of seasons and the taking to the sky of the Canada geese.