

V. CONCLUSION

Before July 11, 1990, the use of arms by First Nations people in the contemporary struggle for land rights was almost unprecedented. Only the future will reveal the significance of the past summer in the larger national context of indigenous peoples' rights. However, that future is fast approaching. The Committee understands that aboriginal affairs issues, including Mohawk government and land issues, present an enormous challenge. Further, Canada must build greater expertise in the field of race relations and police relations. Despite the complexities and the many obstacles to progress, some substantive policy change is required immediately. And it is precisely because there are genuinely held yet differing perspectives on critical issues, that there must also be continuing national discussion to pave the way for further progress. Goodwill alone will not stem a rising tide of alienation, frustration and anger.

There is a deep well of public support for First Nations people on the issues of land rights and self-government. There is an equally deep commitment to the principle of non-violent social and political change. The armed standoff at Kanesatake and Kahnawake triggered conflicting emotions as Canadians tried to reconcile their support in these two areas. In the end, it seems clear that support across the country for the peaceful struggle of indigenous people and the general cause of peaceful conflict resolution remains deeply entrenched in the public mind. Canadians want to see justice achieved for aboriginal people in Canada but will not accept any side of the negotiating table resorting to the use of arms as a negotiating technique or as a fail-safe for a lack of creativity, goodwill or negotiating skill. In a world of competing interests and often conflicting perspectives and values, peaceful conflict resolution is the only real guarantee of human rights and good government.

What happened on July 11th, 1990 at Kanesatake and Kahnawake and why? This is the question the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs has had before it since October, 1990. While the Committee cannot answer all the questions arising from these events, there are some facts and issues that plainly present themselves and from which the Committee can draw conclusions.

There was some evidence before the Committee that armed Warriors began to arrive at the barricade in The Pines—days, perhaps weeks before July 11, 1990. There was also evidence from other witnesses present in the area at the time that they saw no sign of arms around the initial barricade before that date. Evidence suggests that on the morning of July 11th, there was an exchange of gunfire and that some people were in a position to respond with weapons to the armed movement of the Sûreté du Québec. On what day did weapons and the persons using them arrive? What degree of community involvement was there in the decision to enter into an armed confrontation? These are not questions the Committee is able to answer conclusively from the information available to it.