

at the federal and provincial level. Several provinces have either completed, or are in the process of conducting inquiries into aboriginal justice issues (Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan). These inquiries vary in scope but have focused on issues of discrimination by law enforcement officials in dealing with aboriginal offenders and victims, policing services on reserve, the extent to which the justice system is meeting the needs of aboriginal people particularly in remote northern communities and the merits of creating distinct aboriginal court systems. A recent Angus Reid poll found that 51% of the general Canadian population feel aboriginal people are treated unfairly by the courts and 63% believe that aboriginal people should have their own police and justice systems. A 1988 research report of the Canadian Sentencing Commission (*Native Offenders' Perceptions of the Criminal Justice System*) concluded that "...many Native offenders view the justice system as a critical component of the dominant society that is excluding them or rendering them marginal. Furthermore, the data indicates that they believe that virtually the entire justice system as a system — in contrast to many of the individuals who work within it — is biased against Native people" (p. 84).

Provincial inquiries are revealing problems in the status and treatment of aboriginal people in all aspects of the justice system from policing to incarceration. The prospect that racism in one form or another may underlie many of these problems is causing Canadians to ask questions about the extent to which racist or ethnocentric tendencies may exist in Canadian society and to seriously examine the state of interethnic relations. As each of the current inquiries is concluded, more will be known about the experience of aboriginal people in the justice system and about the scope of federal action that may be required and considered desirable by the aboriginal community. The federal government has an important role in reviewing the issues raised from a national perspective.

12. International Treaties Affecting Aboriginal Rights

Canadian court decisions have noted that international treaties entered into by Canada have often had a negative impact on the rights of aboriginal people arising from "Indian" treaties or other sources. For example, the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* has restricted rights