

## **LEGAL & JUSTICE ISSUES**

Recourse to the law is rarely the most effective way to deal with social problems. The law does, however, perform an important, if often secondary, function. It is used to ensure that socially desired goals are attained and to prevent them from being undermined. It also has an educative function - it says to the citizens of a democracy that certain behaviour and acts are unacceptable and are to be sanctioned by punishment. The law thus acts not only to enforce certain rules but also to ensure that the bounds of acceptable behaviour are clearly understood by the populace.

Many witnesses advocated tougher laws and better trained police officers as ways to promote more harmonious relations in Canadian society and to reduce racism. Many visible minorities feel that present laws do not adequately ensure that they can live in peace and without fear.

Police officers are perceived by visible minorities to respond to complaints with misunderstanding, reluctance and even animosity; and to respond to complaints against visible minorities with over-enthusiasm and unwarranted assumptions. Recruitment of visible minorities as police officers and recruitment of whites who are disposed to be tolerant of racial diversity were seen as helpful by witnesses. Training programs to promote cross-cultural understanding were seen by witnesses as imperative for current police forces.

The Committee's deliberations in this area have been influenced by a sensitivity to the important issues of civil liberties and by a desire to promote conciliation, not polarization, between individuals and groups in Canadian society.