

There is a number of encouraging initiatives in the area of economic development, such as the great interest shown by aboriginal people and communities in developing new businesses and establishing their own trade and business organizations, such as the Native Investment and Trade Association. Government funded initiatives include the opening of the aerospace technology program at the First Nation Technical Institute and the launching of the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS). CAEDS is intended to create new opportunities for aboriginal people and communities and is funded in the amount of \$873.7 million over the next five years. While there is much progress to be made in improving the economic conditions of aboriginal people, the aboriginal community is demonstrating a wealth of ideas and energy in taking up this challenge. One of the most important issues directly involves the federal government and that is, legal restrictions blocking economic development on reserve.

#### **17. Off-Reserve Aboriginal People: Metis, Non-Status Indians and Off-Reserve Status Indians**

The socio-economic and legal status of Metis, "non-status Indians" and off-reserve "status Indians" is an issue raised by several witness groups as one requiring urgent attention. Aboriginal people living off-reserve have far less access to government programs and services than the on-reserve population and yet they suffer similar socio-economic deprivations. Off-reserve aboriginal people are often caught in the middle of federal-provincial disputes over legislative jurisdiction and government responsibility. In the meantime, the quality of life of many urban-based people is shockingly poor.

#### **18. Environmental Issues**

Environmental issues have always been a major concern of aboriginal people. There are several important reasons why this is so. In a very practical way, the economic well-being of aboriginal people is closely tied to the land in its natural state because of the continuing importance of traditional pursuits (hunting, fishing and trapping). Just as importantly, aboriginal people engage in these activities for cultural and spiritual reasons. The continuing spiritual relationship of