

## PREFACE



The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs identified a critical need for housing both on and off reserve as an area of concern in its 1990 report to the House of Commons entitled "*Unfinished Business: An Agenda for All Canadians in the 1990s*".<sup>1</sup> Since that time it is clear that solutions have not been found. The 1991 Report of the Auditor General indicates that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) do not have a solution to the on-reserve housing backlog. The government's review of the On-Reserve Housing Program, which began in 1975, has not yet been concluded. Moreover, budgetary reductions to already inadequately funded programs increased the Committee's concern. Northern housing is included in this study due to the large aboriginal population in northern Canada and the fact that programs do not differentiate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The Committee invited the federal and provincial governments, the four major aboriginal political organizations, and a number of other organizations and individuals having interest or experience in the field, to share their views. In addition, the Committee visited as many regions of Canada as was possible to experience housing conditions first hand.

Witnesses identified many problems with current housing programs and delivery systems; including, overcrowding, lack of adequate housing and infrastructure and a growing backlog. Some housing is culturally inappropriate. There

is a lack of housing other than through federal programming, particularly in the North where there is virtually no private market, and on-reserve where individuals, as well as First Nation governments, have difficulty accessing financing. There is debate about responsibility for various sectors of the aboriginal population (e.g. off reserve, Métis) and limited involvement of aboriginal people in federal housing policy and program decisions. There is inflexibility in federal housing programs, limited economic spinoffs for Aboriginal and northern communities, lack of co-ordination between governments and programs and difficulties accessing programs. Federal government lack of action to address these problems, includes DIAND's long overdue revisions to the On-Reserve Housing Program, inadequate DIAND funding and reductions to the CMHC budget.

Witnesses also presented numerous suggestions and solutions. Solutions which have been developed and in some cases applied with great success at the community level. In addition to calling for greater resources, witnesses also stressed that new delivery mechanisms are needed. Rigid housing programs must be restructured to allow for greater flexibility. Greater community input will result in more efficient use of resources and the delivery of housing better suited to the needs of the communities. Witnesses suggested ways in which communities might better participate in the opportunities created by housing construction. The development of aboriginal financial