

21. Circumpolar Issues

Many of the issues affecting the Arctic have a broader and international aspect when considered as circumpolar issues affecting all countries and peoples with interests in the region of the polar ice cap. The Inuit people of Canada are naturally concerned with the development of domestic and foreign policy in this area and have a vital interest in issues such as communications, the environment, renewable and non-renewable resources, trade and military activities. A number of protocol agreements have been entered into between Canada and the U.S.S.R. on subjects such as education, culture, communications, cold weather construction and technology and activities in the circumpolar region affecting the interests of Inuit and other aboriginal people will occur as a result of these agreements. The rest of Canada is only just beginning to perceive the existence of common interests between people of different nations living in the same climatic region.

22. Human Rights Issues

While there is a range of human rights issues involving aboriginal people, the Committee will highlight the following four issues: 1) discrimination and employment equity issues; 2) aboriginal people in the justice system; 3) international human rights initiatives affecting aboriginal people; and 4) women's equality rights under the Indian Act.

Discrimination and employment equity issues with respect to aboriginal people arise from recent statistics showing little improvement in the employment rates of aboriginal people in the federal public service and other employers falling under federal jurisdiction. The 1988 Annual Report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission also raised a range of human rights issues involving aboriginal people such as the disproportionate number of aboriginal people in incarceration.

A recent report by Judge Heino Lilles has identified the existence of a cultural bias at each step of the justice system as a major factor contributing to the high involvement with the criminal justice system by aboriginal people. A groundswell of national support is developing for the notion that governments should examine traditional aboriginal