

of the urgent need to reinitiate constitutional discussions on aboriginal rights issues and to address the concerns of aboriginal people regarding the Meech Lake Accord. In a series of First Ministers Conferences that ended in 1987 a consensus was reached on the desirability of entrenching some form of aboriginal self-government guarantee in the Constitution. Unfortunately, agreement could not be reached on how this guarantee should be expressed.

With respect to the Meech Lake Accord, the Assembly of First Nations in its most recent appearance before this Committee highlighted its concerns respecting the distinct society clause and the proposed changes to the federal spending power.

In the North, constitutional issues are further complicated by issues relating to the settlement of land claims, the process of devolution of powers from the federal to the territorial governments, the issue of the division of the Northwest Territories and the evolution of the territories to provincial status.

4. Treaty Rights and Relations with Treaty Nations

There is a range of issues concerning the proper implementation of treaty provisions. Aboriginal representatives emphasize the need perceived by treaty nations to reorder the nature of federal-aboriginal relations in accord with the original spirit and intent of the Indian treaties.

The specific claims policy encompasses claims based upon outstanding treaty obligations but is considered by many to be too narrow in scope to be able to deal with the level of political and legal rights being claimed by treaty people. Many treaty rights disputes involve questions of interpretation that cannot be adequately dealt with by the specific claims policy. The Committee was also informed that there are a number of issues respecting treaty implementation that do not involve compensation and are not dealt with appropriately because the specific claims policy is designed only to address land entitlement or compensation issues. Further, federal claims policy has no mechanism to deal with disputes over the classification of a particular claim as comprehensive or specific. Recommendations from several sources have been made to establish some form of independent claims tribunal to effectively address some of these questions.