

Many First Nations witnesses described situations in their communities in which persons requiring housing suited to their special needs, such as young single mothers, homeless, seniors and the physically challenged, live in unsuitable housing situations. Governments of First Nations are helpless to address these problems due to lack of sufficient resources. Among these communities is the village of the Gwa'Sala-'Nakwaxda'Xw Band in British Columbia.

"Because no such housing is currently available, some of our disabled Elders are forced to cope with narrow doorways and other inconveniences. More ramps are needed to supplement or replace steps, as well as heavy duty grips and bars in the bathrooms. It is shameful that we have nothing better to offer our senior people."

Witnesses stressed that these differences must be recognized in order that appropriate programs are developed.

"The Government of Canada must accept the north as it is now, on its own terms, while we all try to work towards a stronger northern economy and society. In addition to our cultural distinctiveness, the economy in the Inuit homelands is structurally different from that of the Canadian mainstream. Failure to understand this and deal with policies rooted in this understanding invariably result in the introduction of inappropriate programs and the consistent inefficiency or failure of these well-intentioned programs. And this failure has its own costs" (Ms. Kayrene Nookiguak, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Issue No. 13:11)

Most witnesses also pointed out that Aboriginal people must be involved in decision-making at all levels, from the local level to the national level, so that housing appropriate to the needs of each community is available.

It is also essential that the economic development opportunities associated with housing construction benefit aboriginal communities. There is no question that housing and infrastructure construction is an important contributor to the Canadian economy. CMHC

notes that one in ten jobs in the economy depends on residential construction. Expenditure on new residential construction amounts to about 7% of the gross domestic product.¹² Witnesses, such as Mr. Ray Hamilton, Gabriel Housing, commented that Métis people do not benefit from the economic spinoffs created from housing. Local labour and materials are not utilized because of the inflexibility inherent in federal housing programs.

A recent DIAND discussion paper acknowledged the fact that many aspects of housing continue to be supplied to reserves through non-Indian sources located off reserve, including capital investment, materials and labour. The paper noted that a new Housing Program on-reserve must increase economic and employment benefits to Indian people and communities. DIAND estimated that the volume of construction, repair and renovation of housing each year translates into a potential for the equivalent of at least 5,000 full time jobs on reserve.¹³

Chief Stanley Sainnawap, Big Trout Lake commented that:

"I think bands should be given some authority or control over housing. To build the projects here, either housing or renovation, the lumber has to be graded or stamped. As you know, yesterday I showed you what the graded lumber looked like when we went to the school—all the cracks. . . I think the bands should be given an opportunity to produce their own lumber at least. . . Why should we have to use the commercial way of drying the wood. . . I think those houses, the way they are built right now, are really hazardous. When there's a fire, it would only take about five or ten minutes to flatten the whole house. . . So one of my proposals is that the band should be given an opportunity to look at how they want to control and handle their housing program." (Chief Stanley Sainnawap, Big Trout Lake Band, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Issue No. 26A:42)

In Iqaluit, Mr. Chuck Tolley, Director of the Baffin Divisional Board of Education commented that: