

If a decision was taken in advance of July 11 to arm persons at The Pines barricade, it is not clear by exactly what process in the Mohawk community it was decided to convert a peaceful blockade on a minor recreational road into a barricade defended by persons with semi-automatic assault rifles. Was there community consensus or a majority in favour of taking up arms? We don't know. We can say there was something less than unanimity on the point, within the community of Kanesatake as a whole, within the Longhouse at Kanesatake and within the Mohawk nation. Further, the use of arms and the role of the Warrior Society were controversial issues and remain so.

Equally mystifying, is that no level of government appears to claim responsibility for ordering the police assault on the barricade in The Pines early on July 11, 1990 when armed Warriors as well as unarmed women and children were present. The Municipality of Oka and the provincial government have said that in the week before the assault, there was a general expectation that police would act to deal with what was regarded as a breach of law and order. However, all levels of government have publicly denied having advance knowledge of exactly when and how the police raid would be conducted. How did this jurisdictional vacuum arise? No one has answered this question or provided the Committee with sufficient information to draw a conclusion.

The Committee was struck by the fact that several key parties involved in the standoff, have indicated they would not change their actions if they faced the same situation again. In this sense, while everyone on all sides deplores the lasting trauma suffered by the many children involved, deplores the use of violence, and deplores the loss of life, neither side to the dispute has taken much responsibility for ensuring history does not repeat itself. The Committee believes this is not a conclusion Canadians will accept. The creative use of effective non-violent strategies for political and social change is always a viable option and in this era, restraint, sensitivity and effective communication at all levels of government should be able to defuse highly charged situations before they degenerate into physical conflict. It is clear that the parties on each side of the conflict must re-evaluate their actions and consider whether the sacrifice of human rights and human life, borne by innocent people, native and non-native, was in fact truly inevitable in the sense that there was nothing they could have done differently to achieve their ends with less destructive consequences.

The Standing Committee is convinced that the tragedy that played throughout the summer of 1990 was avoidable. All parties involved must take responsibility for allowing this dispute to be converted into a military and criminal law issue. Action must be taken by First Nations leadership and government at all levels to avoid this from happening again.