

Among the many examples presented to the Committee by witnesses, two forms of First Nation governmental organization are illustrative. The Iroquois (as they were known by the French) or Six Nations (as the English called them) or the Haudenosaunee (*People of the Longhouse*, as they called themselves) have a formalized constitution, which is recited every five years by elders who have committed it to memory. It provides for a democratic system in which each extended family selects a senior female leader and a senior male leader to speak on its behalf in their respective councils. Debates on matters of common concern are held according to strict rules that allow consensus to be reached in an efficient manner, thus ensuring that the community remains unified. A code of laws, generally expressed in positive admonitions rather than negative prohibitions, governs both official and civil behaviour. Laws are passed by a bicameral legislature, made up of senior and junior houses. A council of elders oversees the general course of affairs. Since officials are chosen from each extended family, the system is called 'hereditary'. While the commonly held belief is that hereditary chiefs hold dictatorial powers, these leaders are actually subject to close control by their people and can be removed from office by them.

The Canadian government suppressed the Haudenosaunee government by jailing its leaders and refusing to give it official recognition. In 1924, the council hall at the Six Nations Reserve was raided by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). All official records and symbols of government were seized and have never been returned. The system of 'band councils' mandated in the *Indian Act* was installed in its place.

The second example is that of the Potlatch, a system used by many First Nations on the West Coast. From time to time, community or national leaders call assemblies which are widely attended. Through ceremony, song, dance and speeches, new leaders are installed in office. Wealth is redistributed through an economy based on giving rather than accumulating. Names are given and recorded. Political councils are held and decisions are made. History is recalled and instructed. Spiritual guidance is given. While the system of the Potlatch is very different from that to which Europeans are accustomed, it contains all the necessary elements to maintain continuity, good government and a sense of identity, and it permits people to conduct their own affairs and to determine the course of their destiny.

As was the case with the Haudenosaunee, the Potlatch was outlawed by the Canadian government. Attendance at Potlatch functions was prohibited by law as late as 1951, and jail sentences were handed down to violators. All of the ceremonial items and symbols of government were seized by the federal government. Despite the return of some items, a large number have not been returned and are dispersed in museums in Canada and abroad. People who lived according to the Potlatch had to practise their religious beliefs clandestinely and were forced to live under a system of government imposed on them. Despite this suppression, traditional governmental systems like that of the Haudenosaunee and the Potlatch have not disappeared.

The Committee values the understanding it gained during the course of its hearings. All Canadians would benefit from similar information so that their understanding of their relationship to the Indian First Nations could be extended. In this way, the popular view of Indians could be corrected. They would learn that Indians were not pagan and uncultured, but peoples who moved from free, self-sustaining First Nations to a state of dependency and social disorganization as the result of a hundred years of nearly total government control.