

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

The urgent nature of the post-secondary education issue evidenced by the student hunger strike, the many protests in the aboriginal community, and the encroachment of the 1989-90 academic year made the Committee feel it necessary to study and report on this matter as soon as possible. As a result, time restraints limited the number of witness groups that could appear before the Committee. Major national groups and a small number of regional groups were invited to appear before the Committee and most did. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) declined the Committee's invitation. However, some of the constituent groups of the AFN either appeared or provided written submissions. The groups who appeared before the Committee are listed in Appendix A.

The Committee also invited written submissions from other interested individuals and organizations. A list of written submissions received from individuals or organizations who did not have an opportunity to appear is provided in Appendix B. In addition, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Honourable Pierre Cadieux, appeared twice before the Committee on the subject of this Report.

The Committee reports as follows on the issues raised and the evidence it received in the course of its study of the Post-Secondary Student Assistance Program of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

GENERAL

The critical importance of education to aboriginal people and of post-secondary education in particular was emphasized by practically all witnesses and submissions.

If you talk to any Indian leader in this country, you will not get an argument about the value post-secondary education has brought to our communities. We have had all these other things in our communities—welfare programs, makework jobs, and all those other things—but the real changes are happening because our people are going to university and taking their skills and using them, with the knowledge of our old people, to start to make meaningful changes in our community. (Mr. George Watts, President, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, Issue 9:13)

Several witnesses referred to statistics on the significantly lower levels of educational achievement in the aboriginal population and other relevant socio-economic indicators. The Committee has included in Appendix C of