

The Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform has concluded a 14-month series of community dialogues that also included town hall-style meetings in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina. The objective of these community dialogues was to maximize opportunities for people living in those communities, local organizations and groups to provide their views on the justice system. They were invited to offer solutions to the shortcomings they have identified as well as any successes they have experience with.

During the first 19 months of its mandate, the Commission received almost 40 presentations from organizations including: police services, justice system workers, government departments, advocacy groups, women's groups, First Nations organizations and Métis Locals.

The Justice Reform Commission visited 17 communities at their invitation and participated in community dialogues. These events took place in First Nations communities, in large cities and in remote northern villages. Among the communities visited were Black Lake, Pelican Narrows, North Battleford, Fort Qu'Appelle, Onion Lake First Nation and several others.

In addition to the dialogues and presentations, the Commissioners held various meetings and in-camera sessions. We heard from provincial court judges and met with the chief judge of the provincial court on several occasions. The Commission met with the editorial board of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix. Political leaders including the caucus of the governing party of Saskatchewan, the NDP, representatives of the provincial Liberal Party and the Saskatchewan Party met with us. The Commission recently met with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan's Justice Minister Alex Maurice and held a daylong meeting with the deputy ministers of eight provincial government departments. We have met with FSIN Vice-Chief Lawrence Joseph on a number of occasions.

Fifteen on-site visits to youth custody facilities, correctional facilities, women's shelters and other facilities provided valuable first-hand evidence and information to be considered by the Commissioners in the coming months. In every situation we made it a practice to hear from staff and residents in these institutions.

Important meetings were held with Elders from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. On July 23, the Commission will meet with Métis Elders and attendance at two Northern Justice Symposiums in Prince Albert, April 2002 and La Ronge, April 2003 gave the Commissioners an opportunity to hear firsthand about the unique problems facing the people charged with the responsibility of delivering justice and other services in the province's North.

A key component of the Justice Reform Commission's first phase was the organizing of several roundtables designed to bring together a variety of perspectives on very specific issues. The guidance received from participants with a great deal of expertise in these areas will be invaluable in our future deliberations.

The following roundtables have been held:

1. Research Roundtable
2. Racism Roundtable
3. Victims and Violence Roundtable
4. Police Issues Roundtable
5. Restorative Justice Roundtable
6. Crime Prevention Roundtable
7. Governance & Community Development Roundtable
8. Implementation Roundtable

Summaries of all the roundtables held by the Justice Reform Commission can be viewed on the website at: www.justicereformcomm.sk.ca

Critical Issues Strategy

In an effort to break down the task of examining the justice system into manageable segments the Commissioners have identified eight critical areas which are common to justice studies nationally. These areas include:

1. Racism
2. Restorative Justice
3. Youth/children
4. Crime Prevention
5. Policing
6. Victims & Violence
7. Justice Institutions
8. Governance & Community Development

A common thread running through these critical areas is the need for community involvement and for the people involved to forge partnerships. It is also obvious that these areas cannot be addressed in isolation, there is considerable overlap which underscores the need for communities, governments and organizations to work together in order to find solutions to the problems that undermine the justice system.

Four Outcomes

The Justice Commission has identified four outcomes that it hopes will emerge from its work when completed less than a year from now.

We believe it is essential to foster an environment in which all people are prepared to **Lift Each Other Up** as we develop as a community. This is in contrast to a system which has traditionally focussed on the negative aspects of Aboriginal peoples' lives.

It is beneficial for individuals, communities, justice system professionals and leaders within governments of all types to accept **Responsibility** for their actions and to make changes that will benefit the people, the community and the province.

In order for any real change to occur it is necessary to identify **Champions for Change**, people who are prepared to renew the fight for a society that guarantees justice for all its citizens. These Champions for Change may be individuals or organizations that will accept the challenge to encourage reform long after the Commission has completed its mandate.

The Commission believes that community and individuals within it need to be the driving force of change – with strong support from government and leaders.

Finally, this commission strives to leave a **Legacy of Hope** for the people of Saskatchewan after March 31, 2004. If we have done our work properly, people who currently have no confidence in the justice system and see only despair in their lives will have reason to believe there is hope for a healthier, more prosperous future and that change is imminent.

Research

In addition to the examination of the eight critical areas and the design of a report with the four outcomes identified, the Commission is examining the costs of doing nothing about our current situation, governance and community development to empower communities to address their own issues, with adequate resources, and finally the internal issues common to the criminal justice service providers.

We are working closely with our partners to access information from as many forums as possible. The final report will focus on developing a process for building stronger, healthier relationships between people in Saskatchewan. We are closely examining all implications of possible recommendations and solutions.

Implementation Strategy

It was made very clear back in November 2002 when this Commission was established that no one was prepared to participate in another study that would be shelved with no hope of its recommendations being implemented. Our partners and stakeholders made that known from the outset. Since then we have often been reminded of this direction whether it was at community dialogues, town hall meetings or at roundtables.

We have been mindful of our obligation to develop an implementation vehicle that will ensure that the work of this Commission is not lost and that it will provide the foundation for reform. A roundtable designed to specifically address the implementation strategy was convened in June 2003 and more work is being done in this critical area.

We cannot overstate the importance of this part of the commission's work and we invite individuals and organizations to offer any counsel they wish to provide in this area.

The September 2003 interim report will provide more detail on implementation.

Conclusion

As you have seen, we have participated in dialogues, dozens of meetings, in-camera sessions and other discussions. This process involved the very valuable aspect of hearing from thousands of people in all regions of Saskatchewan. The stories have been graphic and disturbing in many instances. We can not lose sight of why the Commission was given its mandate: the deaths of two Aboriginal men in January of 2000 were the catalyst for the creation of this Commission and the abuse that a third man endured at the hands of Saskatoon police officers.

Now we must consider all that we have heard, do more research into specific issues and continue our deliberations in an effort to identify solutions to the problems that have been described and build on successes which exist already.

In mid-September we will be releasing our third and final interim report. It will deal with the implementation strategy and its potential cost to government, expand on the "cost of doing nothing" issue and other subjects.

Our time line will see us complete our research and conclude any further dialogue that is required by the end of this year with the final report to be delivered to the people of Saskatchewan in March of 2004.