

Section IV, Document 12

**ON RESTRICTING FUNDS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
OF NATIVE STUDENTS**

**To the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney,
Prime Minister¹**

Author — Archbishop James M. Hayes, President,
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, April 24, 1989

I am writing at this time to express our concerns over the recent wave of protests by Canada's native peoples, against the federal government's decision to curb funds for post-secondary education for native students.

As you know, the Catholic Church has had a long history of direct involvement in the education of native peoples in Canada. In our view, it is essential that Aboriginal peoples have guaranteed access to opportunities for complete education so they can make a significant contribution to their own development as First Nations and to Canada as a whole.

It is our understanding that the *Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program for Native Peoples* has been highly regarded as an effective program, in the Auditor General's Report. Similarly, higher education authorities like the Canadian Universities Teachers' Association have praised it, calling for its continuation.

The Assembly of First Nations has asked for a moratorium on this recent decision in order to develop a joint process for arriving at a mutual agreement between the First Nations and the Government of Canada on educational policy directions before any program changes are implemented.

We are convinced that this is a reasonable request, though Mr. Cadieux, your Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, has refused to entertain it. In our view it would be highly conducive to maintaining and improving education for the native peoples of Canada. While the whole issue is being debated in the House, we feel strongly that the hunger strike of native students has gone on long enough.

NOTE

1. The letter was copied to George Erasmus, President of First Nations; Hon. Pierre Cadieux, Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs; Rt. Hon. John Turner, Leader, Liberal Party; Hon. Edward Broadbent, Leader, New Democratic Party.