

MHR *Connections*

Published by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

Volume 5 Number 7-8

Summer 2005

THE MANITOBA
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION



LA COMMISSION DES
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

Visit our Website www.gov.mb.ca/hrc

In Search of Human Rights

by Dehab A. Isaac

I grew up in an environment where you always wait for the other life. My childhood was filled with fear and constant chaos. I am from, Eritrea, a country with the longest struggle



Dehab Isaac is an intern working at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. She is an immigrant professional with a background in human rights law who is completing a federally funded youth program through Emerge Knowledge.

in Africa. During this long struggle for independence from Ethiopia, I witnessed a lot of human right violations. At that time I was not aware of the term “human rights” but I knew that all the extra judicial killing and arbitrary arrests by the former Ethiopian government were not supposed to happen.

Since independence from Ethiopia in 1991 things have changed to a great extent. However, the war torn country has to deal with a lot of adjustments to improve and respect the rights of its citizens. The current human rights violations are the result of the social, cultural and political structures of the society. Most of the social and

cultural practices perpetuate violence against women. Traditional practices like female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) are some of the human rights abuses that are faced by Eritrean (and most African) women. In North Africa 6,000 women are genitally mutilated each day.

The United Nations is working hard to eliminate FGM, but progress has been very slow. FGM practising societies are outraged when their cultures are considered as barbaric and backward and the practice often goes underground, which makes it even harder to deal with. Female circumcision is viewed as a way of life by the practising societies, and changing this practice requires a lot of understanding. The practice of FGM might continue outside the borders of the practising societies as immigrant communities see FGM as a way of belonging to the home that they have left behind.

In this kind of social structure, international human rights law requires governments to take a range of measures to protect the ‘right to health’ and the right to ‘freedom from discrimination,’ among others. Currently, Eritrea is working on eliminating female genital mutilation and controlling the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is taking many lives in most African countries. About 12 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

Rights continued on page 2

The Rights Connection by Janet Baldwin - Chairperson Terrorism and Human Rights

Terrorism once again gripped the headlines following the recent bombings in Britain and Egypt. As they lived through the shock and horror, many Londoners attempted to carry on their daily lives. In the aftermath, however, the tragic killing by London police of an innocent Brazilian, mistaken for a suicide bomber, highlights the need for responses to terrorism which do not compound the fear or violation of human rights.

Terrorism is a threat to the most fundamental of our rights, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person. While we need to take effective action against terrorism, the measures we rely on must be balanced with our Charter-protected rights and freedoms. The history of our young country has many examples where human rights have been violated through stereotyping and backlash, and the legacy of these past wrongs continues deeply to affect many Canadians. Our state intelligence, investigation and security measures must target dangerous extremists, not religious groups or young men of colour.

The need for a thoughtful response from each of us is increasingly stressed. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Anne McLennan, has warned us that we must psychologically prepare for possible terrorism strikes within our borders. Following the London bombings, many Canadian Islamic clerics jointly denounced violence and extremism. More Canadians should speak up against such threats, whether heard in sacred spaces, community centres, or youth clubs.

As Sergio Vieira de Mello, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, killed in Baghdad on August 19, 2003, said: “We all have a part to play in making the enjoyment of human rights a reality for everyone.” A challenge each of us may face is not to let a false sense of security or fear stop us from playing our part.

Public Education a Significant Part of Commission's Work

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is continuing to offer its popular education programs throughout the Fall and Winter of 2005 -2006.

As part of its mandate, *The Manitoba Human Rights Code* states that "it is important that human rights education programs assist Manitobans to understand all their fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as their corresponding duties and responsibilities to others."

According to Assistant Director George Sarides, Commission staff "continues to re-design and offer new programs every year."

One of the re-designed workshops is Human Rights in the Workplace, formerly the all day Employment Seminar. The re-vamped half day workshop offers an overview of *The Code* and focuses on employment concerns including harassment, reasonable accommodation and pre-employment inquiries.

Last year the Commission introduced a workshop on "How to Investigate a Human Rights Complaint". It proved invaluable to many human resource specialists who have to deal with employees who have either been subjected to discrimination and harassment or accused of contravening *The Code*.

New this year is a seminar on employment equity. This workshop dispels commonly held misconceptions about the philosophy and implementation of employment equity programs and suggests ways of ensuring that any such programs comply with *The Code*.

Also available are the Harassment and Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace workshops. These are available to those who wish to develop a more in-depth understanding in these areas.

The education brochure will be available in print form and on the Commission's website in September and will detail times, dates and the cost of individual workshops.

Manitoba Human Rights Policies Available to Public

The policies of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission can now be found on its website. Over the past number of years, the Commission's Legislative and Policy Review Committee has updated and written new policies on such subjects as the Definition of Discrimination, Dress Codes and Drug and Alcohol Testing.

Executive Director Dianna Scarth says that the reason for putting the 23 policies on the website is to assist the public with the interpretation of *The Code*, adding however that "if there is a conflict between the policy and *The Code*, *The Code* prevails."

www.gov.mb.ca/hrc

Rights continued from page 1

African grandmothers are experiencing the full burden of the epidemic as care giving responsibilities increase and at an advanced age, they become surrogate mothers to orphaned grandchildren.

Here in Canada human rights are well-established. We don't see such female subjugation and grave violation of human rights. This signifies the difference between human rights in Eritrea and Canada.

In Manitoba, The Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination in a number of activities including employment, provision of public services and rental of premises. In Eritrea respecting the basic human rights of citizens is still a challenge.

The existence of Human Rights Codes and Human Rights Commissions across Canada mark a major difference. In Eritrea there is no Human Rights Code or Human Rights Commission where you can address a human rights complaint. The Human Rights Commissions across Canada are the reflection of how far Canadians has come towards respecting human rights and they should not be taken for granted.

Human Rights Word Find

T N E M S S A R A H Y B Z T
 D I S A B I L I T Y Q R N F
 I M R N F R K M X S I A G E
 S P E C O M P L A I N A N T
 C E D E Q P Z B C G M H E X
 R B N S A O U J E E V K B E
 I T E T T S S R R N N K T S
 M L G R E S P O N D E N T C
 I D E Y M V K U D E E N G I
 A C C O M M O D A T I O N F
 T H E C O D E K X Y E A K M
 E Q U A L I T Y I Q Y E S D

Words are presented horizontally, vertically and diagonally, backwards and forwards.

ANCESTRY
 HARASSMENT
 DISABILITY
 COMPLAINANT
 RESPONDENT
 ACCOMMODATION
 THE CODE
 EQUALITY

BFOQ (bona fide occupational qualification)
 SEX
 AGE
 PREGNANT
 ABUSE
 GENDER