MHR Connections
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Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

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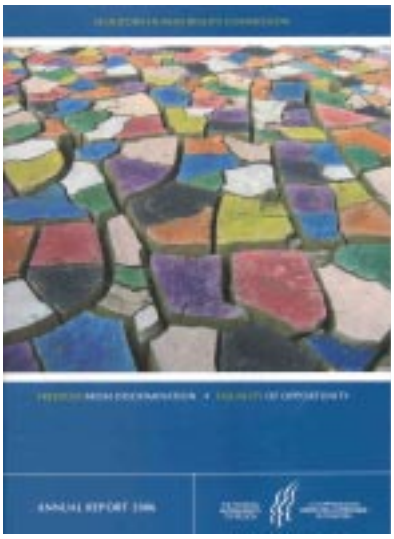
Manitoba Human Rights Commission Releases 2006 Annual Report

Formal Complaints received is the highest since 1990



The total number of formal complaints the Manitoba Human Rights Commission received in 2006 is reaching record highs. According to Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Commission, the number of formal complaints received (297) is the highest since 1990 and rivals the numbers recorded in the first few years following the proclamation of the Human Rights Code (Manitoba) in December 1987. She adds that in 2006, an additional 45 matters were resolved informally through the Commission's pre-complaint process.

The 2006 Annual Report also reveals that the greatest number of formal complaints filed continues to be on the basis of physical and mental disability. Ancestry complaints were the second highest. In recent years complaints based on sex, including pregnancy was second.

Statistics show that disability complaints were at 41.5%, while complaints based on ancestry were at 20%, and sex, including pregnancy, were at 18% of the total number of formal complaints filed.

The Commission is also facing more complicated systemic complaints. "One of the greatest challenges," says Ms Scarth "is the level of resources available to deal with systemic complaints."

Systemic complaints raise allegations of discriminatory treatment of large groups. Examples of systemic complaints range from the accreditation of foreign trained doctors to the treatment of women incarcerated in provincial institutions.

"Systemic complaints require extensive research and investigations, but resolutions have a great impact in addressing large scale patterns of discrimination," says Ms Scarth.

The 2006 Annual Report is available on the Commission's website at www.gov.mb.ca/hrc.

The Rights Connection
by Jerry Woods - Chairperson
Looking Beyond Our Assumptions

A University of Toronto study has revealed what many of us hoped was changing, but feared still existed. It found signs of systemic discrimination against women in our health care system.

The study revealed that men and women are treated differently in the provision of health care. The disturbing news is that critically ill, older women receive less life support and die more often than men in intensive care units. According to media reports, researchers are still at a loss as to explain why the sex of a patient influences not only the care received in hospital intensive care units, but also whether or not a patient is admitted in the first place.

Researchers suggest that society characterizes men and women differently, even in the simple description of an individual. Health care workers and family members describe older, female patients as "frail, elderly, women," while men are less likely to be described in such terms. They are "fighters." Many of us unwittingly use these terms, which reveal assumptions that can lead to a bias.

Women are frequently at the centre of systemic discrimination. In 1987 a The Supreme Court of Canada upheld a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision, which found that CN Rail's recruitment, hiring and promotion policies prevented and discouraged women from working in blue-collar jobs. The Supreme Court ruled that there was a continuing cycle of systemic discrimination.

More recently in 2005, a study using Statistics Canada data determined that academic discrimination is still a factor in many of Canada's universities. Although women make up roughly one-third of faculty, they account for only 10 per cent of Canada's full professors and only 14 per cent of new appointments to academia's higher levels.

Systemic discrimination is a difficult problem to correct through legal or other means because of its pervasiveness in our laws, programs and even words. Studies, including the disturbing University of Toronto research, should serve to remind us to question our assumptions, whether they be about women, race, religion or disabilities.

Human Rights Developments in Nigeria

by Lara Badmus

Human Rights, viewed from whatever lens, are always in an "evolving state." In Canada, the provincial and territory human rights codes and acts, together with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, have greatly defined and advanced the human rights landscape here. Canadians still may face challenges, but abroad Canada is viewed as one of the leading forces in human rights evolution.

Lara Badmus lived and practiced law in Nigeria until earlier this year. She is currently participating in the provincial government's "Volunteers in Public Service Program" at the Commission.

Nigeria is undergoing positive change in its Human Rights developments, despite the many challenges it is facing.

The country originally was defined by 3 regions namely the Northern Region, Western Region and Eastern Region. Presently Nigeria is divided into 46 states, and for almost a decade has enjoyed political stability by embracing an evolving democratic rule. Historically the earliest sign of human habitation was in the Western region, where today the most remarkable development in terms of education, industrialization, and human rights advancements has taken place.

The rights of women and children have been greatly enhanced, particularly in the Western part of the country. Girls have access to education on the same scale as boys, and women participate equally in employment and politics.

The country recognizes most human rights, which are entrenched in its constitution, although because of its cultural values, it does not recognize abortion rights or same-sex rights.

Like many countries, including Canada, Nigeria has signed and ratified many international human rights instruments. An example of one that Nigeria has not signed is the convention on abolishing the death penalty.

Challenges remain but many are being met successfully. Nigeria is taking strides to combat child trafficking, despite the negative media publicity it has received. There are many national campaigns against offenders, and the government has stepped up its actions against them. Law enforcement agents and the police routinely arrest traffickers and they are duly prosecuted.

In recent times, the country has implemented huge reforms in the Administration of Justice. The Court systems and the Ministries of Justice (spearheaded by the Lagos State Government) have made this possible. The Civil and Criminal Procedure Rules of the High Courts have been amended, bringing about speedier and more efficient justice, devoid of the endemic delays, which, at one time, characterized the system.

Prison reforms are underway, though not much can be said of their current effectiveness. Prisons are still overcrowded as a result of the unconstitutional detention of suspects. There also remain occurrences of police brutality against persons, due to the lack of adequate accountability in the Nigerian Police Force. As well, there continues to be sporadic eruptions of violence in the Niger-Delta (the petroleum rich areas) region of the country, resulting in abductions of people and destruction of property. The rebellious youth gangs in these communities are being brought under control with much difficulty, because of the root cause of their rebellion. Many spent years living in inhumane conditions as a result of self-serving leaders who failed to bring about socio-economic development of the region.

In the last decade, the African continent has witnessed development and has risen to challenges in virtually all spheres of its existence. The Human Rights sphere is not isolated from these happenings, but rather is at the epicenter of it.

2007 Accessibility Awards Presents Lifetime Achievement Award

For the first time in the history of the Accessibility Awards, a Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Claude De Forest, a retired professor at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba.

Claude De Forest with his wife Yoshiko at Winnipeg's Accessibility Awards Ceremony.

Mr. De Forest received the award for his dedication to disability issues and socially responsible design. He was a leading force in the establishment of the Universal Design Institute at the University of Manitoba and later served as chair of the Education Committee for the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies.

2007 Accessibility Award Winners are:
■Simaril Inc. Residence
Stan Hutton Architect for Simaril Inc. Residence
■The Handi-Transit Office
Passages Inc. for The Handi-Transit Office
■The German Family Residence
Strike Didur Associates for The German Family Residence
■St. James Assiniboia Centennial Pool & Recreation Complex
Number Ten Architectural Group for St. James Assiniboia Centennial Pool & Recreation Complex

Celebrating International Human Rights Day

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Association for Rights and Liberties will once again be celebrating International Human Rights Day Monday December 10, 2007 by presenting the annual Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award and the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award. This year the Commitment Award recognizes work advancing human rights by overcoming discrimination based on mental disability. The youth award will recognize a youth group or young person who has promoted respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms within Manitoba.

Date: December 10, 2007 Time: 11:30am - 1:00pm
Place: Radisson Hotel 280 Portage Avenue
Tickets $25.00 Available Dec 3, 2007 - Call Beatrice at 945-7653