

(613) 232-2920 (613) 232-7477

Origin of the Human Rights Institute of Canada

The Human Rights Institute of Canada was established in 1974 as a voluntary, non-profit organization interested in human rights and civil liberties. It set out to provide non-partisan, professional research not covered by the Department of Justice, the Human Rights Commission, and other government agencies.

Its research is now carried out by lawyers and voluntary members with a sound knowledge of human rights. A discussion of the achievements of the Institute follows.

ORGANIZATION `

The Human Rights Institute of Canada is a non-profit charitable organization. It was incorporated on March 27, 1974. Its primary goal is:

"To examine and research impediments to the establishment in Canada of equal rights between women and men, and impediments to the full achievement in Canada for all persons, of the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

In order to do this, the Institute has made use of volunteers, a membership of 450 from across Canada, and students under government work plans. Members of the Institute include lawyers, professors, judges, Deans of Law, and a cross-section of Canadians. As well, some Senators and Members of Parliament are involved with the Institute to support its mandate of independent research.

The Institute's Executive is comprised of a President, a First and Second Vice-President, an Executive Secretary, a Secretary and five Directors. It also has an Honorary Board of Governors. An Annual Meeting is held, as well as special meetings throughout the year either regarding immediate issues, or to report

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on the Institute's progress on its long-term goals. Issues are researched and presented to various bodies such as Standing Committees, Government Departments, and either Houses of Parliament. At present the Institute is deeply involved in the issue of equal representation of women in the Senate and has made a formal submission to the Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. It is committed to improving Canada's international agreements and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The leading test case will deal with Canada's legal obligations to appoint women to the Senate equally with men, under International Law.



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PREAMBLE

THE HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE OF CANADA

Lobby and pressure groups seek to influence Government policies and to pass specific laws. Government and the public are frequently caught between the conflicting advocacy statements and different viewpoints about important laws and policies.

The Human Rights Institute of Canada offers an independent, professional, non-partisan source of expert research and advice on laws and policies affecting human rights, civil liberties, and women's rights. The Institute can develop research materials that will reduce the confrontations, provide a source of accurate information for the public and for Government, and help develop an informed public opinion on controversial subjects.

The Human Rights Institute is different from other organizations because it is not a lobby group. Its conclusions are not subject to a vote, and the Institute does not seek to advance the rights of any one group at the expense of other groups. Unlike lawyers in private practice, the Human Rights Institute of Canada does not represent individual persons. The Institute is concerned with laws and policies that affect many people, although the results of Institute research or Institute monitoring of specific situations are a by-product, but are not the goal of the Institute. The Institute refers individuals to the appropriate Government organization or private organization or to lawyers in private The Institute does not propose to have practice. the resources to deal with individual cases, but is concerned with the broad impact of laws and policies.

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HOW THE HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE OF CANADA FUNCTIONS

The Human Rights Institute of Canada is unique. It is not an ivory tower or an academic organization. It relies on experience and training that were developed in the Federal Department of Justice, in the offices of Cabinet Ministers, and in broad dealings with governmental practice, constitutional law, international law, and United Nations conventions. The Institute has a particular knowledge of the Canadian Government Parliamentary system. The Institute also has access to consultants who are particularly aware of the functioning of Government and the Parliamentary system.

The Institute is located in Ottawa, and can therefore be in contact with all levels of Government. The Institute can use former public servants as consultants. The Institute meets a need that is not met by other organizations. Individual persons seek information from the Institute about the organizations from which they might receive assistance in resolving their difficulties under laws and policies of various jurisdictions.

The Institute relies upon actual experiences of Canadians to indicate problem areas with Canadian laws and policies and to focus on where practical research is needed. The Institute provides a bridge between the experience of Canadians and Government through its concerns with development of practival solutions to human rights questions.

The Human Rights Institute of Canada has a number of other important aspects to its advantage. It does not lobby for any particular group and can therefore review and research laws and policies from a broader perspective than organizations seeking to promote rights for only specific interest groups.

The Institute is also independent of Government. Its research conclusions cannot therefore be affected by political appointments that may weaken the decisions and actions of Government agencies. Nor is it restricted by the constitutional limits that create difficulties for federal or provincial agencies. Nor is it limited, as Government agencies are, by the terms of reference of a particular Statute. Its independence and its non-partisan approach offer greater credibility than is possible for a Government agency or for a lobby pressure group.

The Institute has a further advantage. International agreements are frequently quoted by Canadian Governments. The Human Rights Institute possesses a background of experience with international agreements which Canada has accepted in the broad field of human rights. The Institute can give citizens access to independent information about their rights under such international agreements. Such research creates a better informed public and reduces the gap between Canadians and their Governments.

The Institute is particularly concerned at all levels with equality between women and men. The Institute's goal is to provide unbiased, objective proposals for changes in law and policy to advance equality and justice. At a time when relations between the sexes are increasingly difficult, and families are increasingly subject to breakdown, with consequences for the whole of society, it is essential that the Institute have the funds for unbiased, non-partisan research that will examine the difficulties and provide information about solutions.

Such research cannot be done within the Government, or by any existing organization. During the trial period of operation of the Institute, the Institute carried out research for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, with respect to various areas of law. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women used the Institute

research to insist that changes be made in the Bill prepared by the Department of Justice. The result was that the draft Bill was changed to provide rights to women and children who would not otherwise have been included. Such research is an indication of the need for research by the Institute and of the value that it can have.

FUNDING

The Human Rights Institute of Canada has found that there is an enormous need for the impartial professional research that the Institute was established to carry out. However, groups that need the assistance of the Institute are not able to pay for it. Nor can such research be supported on the basis of membership fees or small donations. The Institute has been relying on volunteers, or using students who are able to obtain paid employment afterwards on the basis of their experience with the Institute. We have now outgrown volunteers and students. It is essential that the Institute obtain funding for permanent paid staff.