

# Connections

Equality of Opportunity and  
Freedom from Discrimination

THE MANITOBA  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION



LA COMMISSION DES  
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE  
DU MANITOBA

## Banning Religious Symbols Jeopardizes our Fundamental Rights

On October 27th, we celebrate International Religious Freedom Day, to recognize the hard fought right for all people to practice their religious beliefs, free from discrimination.

With the recent introduction of Quebec's new law, entitled "An Act respecting the laicity of the State," which bans provincial public servants from wearing religious symbols, the significance of this day feels particularly poignant.

Human rights institutions across Canada, including the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, have expressed deep concern that this law is inconsistent with the equality protections that are foundational in our country, those values enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in provincial human rights law and our international human rights treaties.

The effect of this law is clear: it targets people for their religious beliefs, in particular Jewish, Sikh and Muslim Canadians – those most associated with wearing articles of faith – and creates barriers that limit their opportunities from participating in public life. It is imperative that Canada's public service reflect the full diversity of our populations. From coast, to coast, to coast, our children should see themselves reflected in our provincial public service: as teachers, lawyers, judges, police officers and government officials.

Laws which limit freedom of religion open the door to legitimizing racial and religious intolerance. Instead, it is important to reinforce a society where the principles of equality and freedom are paramount.

## The Rights Connection

*Karen Sharma, A/Executive Director*

It is my distinct pleasure and honour to, on an interim basis, help lead the work of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission into 2020. The Commission's mandate is vital to ensuring that all Manitobans lead full lives, in dignity and rights. Over the next year, we are focusing on our strategic priorities: to be a trusted voice on human rights issues that matter to Manitobans, and ensure human rights accountability by efficiently and effectively administering our complaints system.



We know that the work ahead will not be easy. The Commission must continue to work hard to implement the changes necessary to ensure its complaint system is timely and responsive to the needs of Manitobans. And, as we outline in this edition of our bulletin, a rise in intolerance and efforts to legislate limits on human rights protections, underscore the need for human rights institutions to remain vigilant and proactive in addressing discrimination.

With the support and strength of Commission staff, I look forward to meeting these challenges and continuing to advance the Commission's legacy of rights protection.



## Isha Khan leaves the Commission

After ten years of advancing equality for Manitobans, Isha Khan, Executive Director and Senior Counsel, has left the Manitoba Human Rights Commission to help address human rights issues at the federal level.



Isha has been instrumental in protecting human rights in Manitoba, from arguing complaints before the Manitoba Human Rights Adjudication Panel, to implementing initiatives to make our complaints system efficient and responsive. Her work with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission will be missed by all.

## Build Better Workplaces with Human Rights Training

Build a workplace that supports the success of all your employees. Register for our upcoming training, on November 13-14, 2019 to learn the basics of human rights in the workplace. Work through scenarios and discuss how you can identify and address human rights issues and avoid discrimination and harassment complaints. For more information, visit [manitobahumanrights.ca](http://manitobahumanrights.ca).

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## Manitoba Human Rights Awards

For over twenty years, the Commission, in partnership with the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, has held the Manitoba Human Rights Awards in recognition of International Human Rights Day on December 10th. The awards are given to Manitobans who have made significant contributions to promoting respect for human rights and equality. The award recipients are chosen by an independent selection committee made up of representatives from each of the partner organizations.



This year's awards event will be held on December 12, 2019 from 5-8PM at the RBC Convention Centre. The event is open to the public.

Do you know someone who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of human rights? Nominate them to receive an award!

To nominate an awards recipient, or for more information on the Manitoba Human Rights Awards, visit [manitobahumanrights.ca](http://manitobahumanrights.ca).

## Save the Date!

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is hosting the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Commission's National Human Rights Conference in Winnipeg from **June 14 - 16, 2020**. Details and program coming soon to [cashra.ca](http://cashra.ca).

Connections is available in alternate formats upon request