



17th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Government Operations

Report on the Review of the
2011-2012 Northwest Territories
Human Rights Commission
Annual Report

Chair: Mr. Michael M. Nadli

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March 7, 2013

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the 2011-2012 Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission Annual Report and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael M. Nadli". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small horizontal line at the end.

Michael M. Nadli
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2011-2012 NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2011-2012 NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Government Operations has completed its review of the 2011-2012 Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission Annual Report. The Standing Committee would like to thank Mr. Charles Dent, Chair of the NWT Human Rights Commission, and Ms. Deborah McLeod, Director of Human Rights, for their appearance before the Committee on February 14, 2013. The committee also wishes to express its appreciation for the long service of the outgoing Chair, Ms. Mary Pat Short, and the outgoing Director, Ms. Thérèse Boullard.

2011-2012 ANNUAL REPORT

Mary Pat Short of Fort Smith, Rita Mueller from Behchokò, Roger Wah-Shee from Yellowknife, Yacub Adam from Yellowknife, and William Turner from Yellowknife were members of the commission during the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

In 2011-2012, the Director of Human Rights received 367 inquiries, 57% of which originated in Yellowknife. There were 38 new complaints of discrimination on grounds prohibited under the NWT *Human Rights Act*. Approximately 71% of new complaints alleged discrimination in employment. Disability was the ground with by far the highest number of complaints (21), as it has been for the past seven years. The Standing Committee remains deeply concerned by the high number of complaints of discrimination on grounds of disability.

The NWT Human Rights Commission has done excellent promotional work to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities. The Standing Committee is pleased that Commission representatives visited eight communities over the year, and that workshops and audio conferences were offered in regional centres as well as in Yellowknife.

Last year, the Committee encouraged the Commission to maintain and expand its presence in social media. The Commission included a Facebook ad in its promotional campaigns this year, and saw an increase in visitors to its website as a result. However, Members learned during the hearing that the Commission,

which uses GNWT technology services, has no access to social media. The Committee encourages the Commission to discuss access to social media with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly in order to pursue its educational and promotional mandate.

During fiscal years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, the Human Rights Commission initiated a pilot project in which it became a party to all complaints referred for hearings to the separate and independent NWT Human Rights Adjudication Panel. The purpose of the pilot project was to ease the burden on self-represented parties by ensuring, through legal representation of the Commission, that all relevant information was before the Adjudicator. During the pilot project, the Commission became party to 17 complaints.

The Standing Committee strongly agrees that the public interest is served by ensuring there is a balance between parties to a complaint. The Commission's revenue was reduced in 2011-2012 by \$13,000 from the previous year, while legal expenses rose to nearly \$82,000 from about \$29,000. Members believe the Commission should continue to have the opportunity to become a party to complaints referred for hearings, and that it should be appropriately funded for this purpose.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Board of Management provide sufficient additional funding for legal expenses, on an ongoing basis, to permit the NWT Human Rights Commission to continue becoming a party to all complaints referred for hearings to the NWT Human Rights Adjudication Panel.

When the NWT *Human Rights Act* came into force in 2004, it was considered to be the most modern and up-to-date legislation of its kind in Canada. During the hearing, the Commission Chair expressed the view that a review at the *Act's* ten-year anniversary would be appropriate. The Standing Committee reviewed all the annual reports of the Human Rights Commission, all Committee reports, and all of the government's responses, in considering whether there may now be a need for an overall review of the legislation.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Board of Management provide sufficient additional funding for the Human Rights Commission to review the NWT *Human Rights Act* in the context of current Canadian human rights legislation and Northwest Territories realities and make recommendations in its next annual report.

2012-2013 WORK PLAN

The Standing Committee strongly supports the NWT Human Rights Commission's plans for continuing community visits and employer outreach in the 2012-2013 year. The Standing Committee again urges the Commission to visit as many communities as possible each year, and to expand its workshop offerings to smaller communities as well as regional centres. Visits to Wekweeti, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake, Inuvik, Tsiigehtchic, Aklavik, Fort Smith, and Hay River, in addition to Yellowknife, were planned for the 2012-2013 fiscal year.

As planned, in fall 2012, the Commission launched its online social studies curriculum guide, the Teacher's Toolkit. The Standing Committee looks forward with interest to hearing more about the reception and use of this resource for northern teachers in future years. Members were also very pleased to hear about the Commission's plans to research and gather anti-bullying resources for NWT teachers.

The Human Rights Commission also planned to partner with the NWT Disabilities Council in 2012, to offer an award for improved accessibility to physical premises. The award was presented as planned in June, to the Yellowknife branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. The Committee commends both the recipient and the Human Rights Commission for this important initiative.

CONCLUSION

This is a year of transition for the NWT Human Rights Commission. The Standing Committee offers its thanks for the work of past Commissioners and staff for making the Northwest Territories a better place to live for all our citizens. Members look forward to working with the present Commission and staff in ensuring human rights are respected and promoted in the Northwest Territories.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government provide a response to this report within 120 days.