

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Release Time: Immediate

April 11, 1979

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association today asked Alan Williams, Minister of Labour, to take immediate steps to insure that the provincial Human Rights Commission will carry out its mandate under the Human Rights Code. The Association, concerned about recent press reports regarding the conduct of the Commission, also asked for assurances that the Commission would not be allowed to assert control over the activities of the Human Rights Branch. The text of the letter is as follows:

Dear Mr. Williams:

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association is deeply concerned about recent press reports concerning the conduct of the Provincial Human Rights Commission. Under the Human Rights Code, the Commission is responsible for promoting compliance with the Code and for developing educational programmes designed to eliminate discriminatory attitudes and practises. The statements reported in the press do just the opposite. They give encouragement to those members of the public who share the prejudices of some Commission members. Clearly no educational programmes can succeed if it is apparent that members of the Commission do not themselves accept the principles of the Human Rights Code. Compliance with the Code is hardly encouraged in such circumstances. Moreover, such statements deeply hurt women and members of minority groups protected by the Code.

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Prejudice is always painful, but it is especially so when it comes from the agency responsible for promoting human rights.

We do not believe that the statements reported in the press reflect the views of all Commission members. However, it appears that a significant number of Commissioners condoned the statements. In such circumstances, we request that you take immediate steps to insure that the Commission has the will and the capacity to carry out its mandate under the Human Rights Code. We also note the press reports that the Commission wishes to assert its control over the Human Rights Branch. In view of the statements that have been made, it seems clear that such a step would create legitimate doubt as to whether complaints were being processed in a manner fair to the complainant. In order to maintain public confidence in the fair treatment of complaints, we request your assurance that the Commission will not be given control of the activities of the Human Rights Branch.

Bill Deverell
PRESIDENT BCCLA

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