

## MEDIA RELEASE

May 29, 2019

### Special Committee Recommends Human Rights Commissioner

VICTORIA - The Special Committee to Appoint a Human Rights Commissioner has unanimously recommended to the Legislative Assembly that Kasari Govender be appointed as BC's first independent Human Rights Commissioner. The committee's recommendation is included in a report released today.

"Committee members were impressed by Ms. Govender's extensive practice defending human rights coupled with her reputation as an effective administrative manager," said committee chair Sheila Malcolmson. "We especially appreciated her demonstrated commitment to reconciliation and her work advancing women's rights."

"Ms. Govender is an exceptional candidate who brings a wealth of experience to this new independent office," added deputy chair Stephanie Cadieux. "She exemplifies leadership, collaboration and openness – qualities that will serve her very well in this role."

The Human Rights Commissioner is a non-partisan officer of the Legislature responsible for promoting and protecting human rights. The position was established with the adoption of amendments to the *Human Rights Code* on November 27, 2018. The appointment is for a term of five years, and will take effect on September 3, 2019.

The committee's report is available at: [www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/hrc](http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/hrc)

A biography follows.

The members of the committee are:

Sheila Malcolmson, MLA Nanaimo (chair)  
Stephanie Cadieux, MLA Surrey South (deputy chair)  
Raj Chouhan, MLA Burnaby-Edmonds  
Greg Killo, MLA Shuswap

For further information:

Kate Ryan-Lloyd  
Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
Room 224, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4  
Telephone: 250 356-2933 (collect)  
Toll-free: 1 877 428-8337

Fax: 250 356-8172

E-mail: [ClerkComm@leg.bc.ca](mailto:ClerkComm@leg.bc.ca)

## **Biographical Information – Kasari Govender**

Kasari Govender has practiced constitutional law since 2006, with a focus on the equality rights of marginalized people. In her legal work, she has worked closely with people fighting for gender equality, Indigenous rights, children’s rights, the rights of people with disabilities and the rights of migrant communities. She is passionate about equality rights and using the law as a tool to build a more equal and just BC.

Since 2008, she has held leadership positions at West Coast LEAF and has been Executive Director since 2011. She has co-authored a number of key reports and articles, and speaks widely on issues such as violence against women, access to justice, balancing human rights and regulating hate speech. She led West Coast LEAF through a time of significant growth as it has become a leading voice on gender equality in the country, including the rights of all women and other people impacted by gender-based discrimination.

Ms. Govender has in-depth expertise in human rights, constitutional and administrative law. She has represented equity seekers at all levels of court, including the Supreme Court of Canada, with a particular focus on writing intervenor arguments. She has worked on cases engaging the spectrum of human rights issues as they arise in British Columbia, including ones involving single mothers leaving violent relationships, Indigenous women seeking access to the benefits of Indian status, parents seeking services for their children with autism and learning disabilities, access to justice for marginalized women in the Downtown Eastside, and missing and murdered Indigenous women.

She is the founding President of Rise Women’s Legal Centre, and led the establishment of the Centre, a pilot project that has evolved into an independent, non-profit legal clinic. It is the only clinic of its kind in Canada outside of Ontario and has assisted hundreds of self-identified women to access justice in family law.

She earned her law degree from the University of Victoria and her Master’s Degree in International Human Rights Law from the University of Oxford. She has sat on the board of Pivot Legal Society, the Coalition for Public Legal Services, and Society for Children and Youth. She has taught as an Adjunct Professor of Law at the University of British Columbia and as an Instructor at Simon Fraser University. In 2019, she won the Women Lawyers’ Forum’s Award of Excellence for breaking new ground for women in the legal profession in British Columbia.

She is inspired every day by her young son, niece, and nephew to continue the fight for a world free of hate, discrimination and inequality.