

House Statement (Unanimous Consent)

for

**The Honourable Chris Bentley
Attorney General of Ontario**

on

International Human Rights Day

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Queen's Park

(Check against delivery)

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to mark International Human Rights Day.

Sixty years ago, on the 10th of December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to further fight discrimination and oppression.

The declaration represented the first formal international recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms apply to everyone, everywhere, always.

Ontario's own human rights system benefited from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But it is based on the experience of everyday Ontarians – like the late Hugh Burnett, who worked tirelessly for civil rights in the late 1940s and 50s in response to his first-hand experiences of racial discrimination.

I met recently with his daughter to hear his story, and look forward to working with others to find a fitting way to recognize his unique contribution to human rights in Ontario.

As a province, we have always taken a leadership role within Canada when it comes to protecting human rights.

Sadly, one of those leaders, former chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Dorothea Crittenden, passed away earlier this week at the age of ninety-three. Dorothea and all others who have worked for the cause of human rights have our gratitude.

It is fitting that the theme for the 60th anniversary of the declaration is “dignity and justice for all of us.”

This past June, we celebrated the launch of a stronger new human rights system for Ontario.

Through our new human rights system, this government is committed to ensuring dignity and justice for all who face discrimination.

The new system respects the dignity of those with discrimination claims by giving them the ability to bring complaints forward themselves through full, direct and effective access to the Tribunal.

The new Human Rights Legal Support Centre is now representing those who would otherwise have difficulty accessing justice, and is helping to resolve many cases up-front with early attention.

And, through the Ontario Human Rights Commission, we are now better able to proactively address systemic, societal human rights issues.

In this last year, almost half of the four thousand outstanding human rights cases were closed.

Michael Gottheil, Barbara Hall and Raj Anand deserve recognition for their inspirational leadership over the past months and years in building and promoting Ontario's new human rights system.

Together, they have made Ontario an example for the rest of the world.

Justice is a trust that our government holds for the people of Ontario. It must work for everyone in the province and be accessible to all Ontarians.

We are determined to ensure Ontarians have access to justice. That is why we are relentless in our efforts to reform justice for Ontarians – be it for criminal, civil, or family law – so that they can find justice when they need it most.

Our government continues to reform the civil justice system. We are committed to making it simpler, faster and more affordable for Ontarians to resolve their disputes.

These reforms, the changes we recently made to our human rights system, and our government's commitment to reducing child poverty speak directly to the theme of this year's 60th anniversary: "dignity and justice for all of us."

Governments have a clear responsibility to protect human rights – to ensure dignity and justice for those who face discrimination, for families, for everyone.

And we all have an individual responsibility to uphold human rights in our communities, to respect one another's rights and to speak out against discrimination and harassment.

Today we pay tribute to those who originally drafted the declaration 60 years ago, and those who have worked so hard here in Ontario to make that vision a reality.

Thank you.