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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

B.C. Human Rights Commissioner to intervene in case with implications for students' freedom of expression and assembly

Vancouver B.C. – B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner will intervene in an upcoming Court of Appeal case to clarify how human rights protections apply to university students who speak out or participate in peaceful protests in support of human rights.

The case, *Kishawi v Vancouver Island University*, centres on a Palestinian Canadian student who participated in protest activities at the university in support of the human rights of Palestinians. The university suspended Ms. Kishawi for two years on the grounds that some of those activities violated their Student Conduct Code.

The Commissioner's intervention in this case will focus on how administrative decision makers, including universities, must take into account the values underlying the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—in particular, the values of freedom of expression and freedom of association and equality.

Intervenors in court cases do not represent or advocate for either side; rather, they focus on how courts should interpret certain points of law. The Human Rights Commissioner will sometimes apply to intervene in cases that have the potential to impact how human rights law evolves.

"Freedom of speech and assembly are essential parts of our democratic rights," said Commissioner Kasari Govender. "My intervention will clarify that universities have an obligation to balance these values when deciding how to respond to protest activities on campus."

"I look forward to assisting the court by providing legal submissions about how to interpret and apply the doctrine of Charter values in cases like this one."

Related resources

- [Statement: "Rights and responsibilities do not end at campus gates" says B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner](#) (May 2024)
- [Right to participate in democratic systems](#) (webpage on bchumanrights.ca)

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Media contact

To request an interview with Commissioner Kasari Govender, please contact media@bchumanrights.ca or 604-306-7369.

Media kit

[Visit our media kit](#) for images of Commissioner Kasari Govender, pronunciation guidance, bios and more.

About BCOHRC

BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner exists to address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring. Learn more at: bchumanrights.ca

About the Commissioner

Kasari Govender, KC, began her work as B.C.'s first independent human rights commissioner in September 2019. As an independent officer of the Legislature, Commissioner Govender is uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level. Her work through BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner has included community-embedded research about a range of human rights issues and public inquiries into experiences of hate in the pandemic and detentions under *the Adult Guardianship Act*, use of media exclusion zones, and systemic discrimination in policing. It has also included public awareness campaigns about ableism, racism and misinformation, and guidance to government that, among other things, informed the creation of the *Anti-Racism Data Act* and the *Anti-Racism Act*. Commissioner Govender was reappointed for a second term beginning in September 2024.

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