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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New guidance supports local governments to address the unequal impacts of disasters

Vancouver B.C. – B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner has released new guidance for municipalities and regional districts to apply a human rights-based approach to emergency management plans. The Commissioner's [Rights Under Pressure: Guidance on Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Emergency Management](#) provides practical guidance on how emergency plans can mitigate the unequal impacts of disasters, address the rise of hate and gender-based violence after times of crisis and improve access to mental health services. The guidance comes in advance of emergency planning requirements in the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) taking effect in January 2027, which includes the requirement for local governments to take measures to mitigate the adverse effects of an emergency on individuals who may experience intersectional disadvantage.

British Columbia has experienced unprecedented disasters since 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadly heat dome and atmospheric rivers in 2021, and the devastating wildfires in 2023. Disasters such as these can create conditions which pose a serious risk to fundamental human rights. "While these disasters impact all of us, crises can also deepen inequities and place the most severe impact on marginalized communities, such as increases in hate, higher rates of gender-based violence and mental health challenges," said Commissioner Kasari Govender. "Adopting a human rights-based approach to emergency and disaster plans empowers local authorities and governments to develop response measures that prevent inadvertently perpetuating inequality or worsening disaster impacts."

Today's release builds on the Commissioner's inquiry into the rise of hate during the COVID-19 pandemic, which contains 12 recommendations primarily aimed at the Government of British Columbia to take actions against the rise of hate during times of societal crisis. The Commissioner eighth recommendation from the inquiry calls on the Province to incorporate a human rights-based approach to existing emergency response procedures. To be effective, an all-of-society approach is necessary with collaboration between all levels of government and the social sector, including nonprofit organizations, charities, frontline and outreach services. The guidance offers promising practices aimed at helping emergency planners address both the short and long term human rights issues arising from emergency events

"It is indisputable that hate and violence increase in times of societal crisis; the question is really what we do about it. The upcoming legal requirement for local governments to incorporate an equity lens in emergency response plans recognizes these risks and compels local governments to act. Our Guidance provides practical approaches to implementing this requirement," said Commissioner Kasari Govender. "With these commitments to human-rights based emergency planning, we can enhance resilience and support recovery grounded in dignity, justice and the full range of human rights."

Related resources

- [Rights Under Pressure: Guidance on Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Emergency Management](#)
- [From Hate to Hope, BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner](#)
- [Emergency management legislation, Province of British Columbia](#)

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Media contact

For more information or to request interviews 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 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 public inquiries into experiences of hate in the [pandemic](#) and detentions under the *Adult Guardianship Act*, a report on systemic discrimination in policing, community embedded research about a range of human rights issues experienced by people living in British Columbia, public awareness campaigns about [ableism](#) and [racism](#) and guidance to government that, among other things, informed the creation of both 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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