



Conference News

2010 HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE: EVERY DAY EVERY PERSON EVERY RIGHT—A WORK IN PROGRESS

Joint Committee plenary session: Keep in touch

During the Joint Committee plenary session, member Eddie Kennedy urged delegates to keep in touch with the committee and other members. “We want you to engage with one another,” he said.

Kennedy said the National Component has a challenging mandate given the diversity of members and employers—60 employer groups and agencies employ 26,000 members from coast to coast to coast and in embassies and missions around the world. “This diversity makes the National Component unique.”

The committee outlined the seven values that guide the National Component: solidarity, respect, integrity, leadership, accountability, equality, and social justice. The Component’s mission is to ensure members and officials can work in solidarity to represent such a diverse membership.

A delegate thanked the committee members for their presentation, saying, “We need to explain to our members what our union is all about. Your material will help with that.”

IN THE HALLS

Based on what you’ve heard and seen, what will you do differently when you get back to your local?

“Provide more knowledge to my members—to be able to share it, to allow for people to ask questions, and to be able to adapt and change; to give them more of that background that they didn’t have before. That’s the biggest thing.”

- Chris Gagné,
Indian and Northern
Affairs Canada, Winnipeg, MB

“I will start by explaining to my members why respect is important for promoting human rights. Equity groups are very important. One has to demystify what they do.”

- Daniel Toutant, Parks Canada,
Trois-Rivières, Quebec

Closing plenary: National Component a leader in the promotion of human rights

Robyn Benson, PSAC Regional Executive Vice-President for the Prairie Region, spoke at the closing of the 2010 National Component (PSAC) Conference on Human Rights by reminding participants of the urgent need to continue to work against the current government’s anti-worker and anti-human rights agenda.

Benson said policies that continually attack equity and human rights in Canada are often wrapped in the guise of fiscal restraint and accountability. She cited the current government’s failure to ratify a universal child care policy and refusal to sign the Kelowna Accord as unacceptable attacks on women’s and First Nations’ rights.

Closures of human rights offices across the country impede individual complaints, and cancelled funding to

non-governmental organizations prevents the advocacy and promotion of human rights in Canada.

In the face of such policies, Benson urged participants to remain active in their support of the National Component, which she described as a leader in the promotion of human rights issues.

Employment equity and human rights remain a vital component of PSAC’s agenda, said Benson. Through collaboration and support, National Component brothers and sisters will continue to build a stronger union that will remain effective in the promotion of human rights and equity issues for all.



New friendships



Conference News

Human Rights 101:

What can be done about discrimination?

During the Human Rights 101 workshop, co-facilitator Angela Decker asked delegates to consider ways to address discrimination issues, and challenged each delegate to make one goal in the coming months to advance human rights in their workplace.

Noting that “an injury to one is an injury to all,” co-facilitator Allison Pilon said abuses do not have to be intentional—“the effect is the impact; that’s what defines discrimination.” A delegate said discrimination can be cruel and damaging, affecting performance levels and health, and causing the victim to withdraw.

Delegates discussed various strategies for addressing discrimination. One delegate said each act and word of abuse must be denounced—“we cannot let anything pass by.” Another said “silence is very damaging—it can feed discrimination.”

One delegate said he and his local executive developed a protocol that included their rights. “Since we signed this document, respect is back in our local and we have fewer grievances.”

Delegates discussed the importance of education, noting that in addition to educating themselves, members must also make those around them aware of their right to speak out and receive equitable treatment.

“We’re beginning to understand our roles,” said one delegate. “That is a measure of the success of this conference.”

Noting that the long-form census is an important source of data for human rights activism, Pilon encouraged delegates to write their MPs and demand its reinstatement.

Demystifying Activism: Engagement is key

Continually striving for progressive involvement leads to progressive change, said PSAC Ontario’s regional representative Jawara Gairey during the second day of the Demystifying Activism workshop. Blending both traditional and untraditional forms of activism will enhance progress and result in achievements that benefit all, he said.



News with coffee

Activism is an important component of PSAC members’ daily and professional lives, said Gairey. He and co-facilitator Steve Houston led participants through small group brainstorming sessions to discuss strategies to foster engagement within the workplace. Groups based their discussions on the seven foundations of activism: economic fairness, social justice, ecological sustainability, deep democracy, peace, simple living, and revitalized community.

A broader group discussion looked at extending engagement into the community. Participants were introduced to various tools to further PSAC’s role in solving social issues and creating better communities, including partnering with local organizations, creating alliances with invested community stakeholders, and using innovative techniques such as social networking to take the message into the community.

IN THE HALLS

“I’ve decided to step down from the executive. I think the activism needs to go on at the shop steward’s level, so I’m going to be reassigned as a shop steward. I’m working with the community and with the workers themselves, rather than within the executive.”

-Phillip Lillies, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Moncton, NB

“We have a lot of new people and no corporate memory. People are forgetting the history and how we came this far with human rights. I’m going to try to get youth involvement. I think it’s really important that everybody here goes back and educates everyone.”

-Heather Sams, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Ottawa

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“The word of the day is to remember that both community and member engagement are important options,” said Gairey. He encouraged participants to persist when engagement practices seem to go unnoticed, noting “there is always something new to try.”