

**Introduction – Carole J. Brown, President**  
**A Call to Action: Promoting Equity and Diversity in the Legal Profession**

Good Morning

I am pleased to welcome you to our panel *A Call to Action: Promoting Equity and Diversity in the Legal Profession*, and equally pleased to welcome our panelists this morning. As you know, I have defined as one of my focuses and initiatives for this year, equity and diversity in the profession and breaking down barriers to professional advancement facing members of our profession in equity-seeking groups. Principles of equity are recognized and enshrined in the United Nations Charter; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by Canada in 1970; the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; the LSUC Rules of Professional Conduct and the CBA Code of Professional Conduct. As lawyers, we must be acutely aware of our obligations under the law, must ensure that these laws are respected and enforced, and must provide a leadership role in the struggle against systemic discrimination.

Before introducing our panel this morning, I want to provide to you a brief overview of why this issue is so important to me personally. It will help to give you a brief summary of my background, and my experiences growing up, which informed my awareness, heightened my concern and deepened my commitment regarding these issues.

I was born in the United States just before the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. I lived in the United States, where I witnessed segregation, the subsequent years of desegregation, the leadership of Martin Luther King and his “*I have a dream*” speech, and tragically, his assassination, and then the “Black is Beautiful” movement. These experiences all informed my awareness as I grew. As a university student, I worked for the Head Start program, which was a federally funded educational program that offered assistance to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and the ghettos at very early stages of their lives to attempt to break down barriers and “to break the cycle of poverty”. Also as a student, I worked in New York City, in Hispanic Harlem, as a social case worker, assisting squatters to obtain permanent housing. Thereafter, I went to France, where I saw barriers to advancement among equity-seeking groups, particularly among the *pidé noir* population from Algeria.

I moved to Canada in 1975, a seminal time in this country’s history; at a time when Toronto, my first Canadian home, was becoming a very multicultural city; when the Francophone population of Canada was seeking greater linguistic rights; when our indigenous and aboriginal populations were also seeking to advance their rights; and when Canada was seeking greater cultural protection from the dominance of the American culture. I was in Canada for the advent of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which had a significant impact on all of our lives and caused all Canadians to be more acutely aware of the rights, freedoms and obligations of Canadians and means of advancing those rights in our society.

I myself, graduated from law school at a time when only 30% of the student population was female, and when only about 10% of women lawyers remained in private practice after 10 years. In my own professional practice, I was the first woman partner in my law firm and did not have another woman partner join me for 5 years thereafter, so gender challenges and barriers were also real.

The Canadian society has progressed since those days, and we have much to be proud of for the advances that have been achieved in our country. While we have come far, we still have a long way to go, and must always remain vigilant to ensure that rights of all members of our society and the opportunities for all members of our society continue to be protected, promoted and advanced by us.

The purpose for the panel today is to educate us with respect to the issues facing all of the equity-seeking groups in our Association and our profession, and to understand where we have come from, where we are today and where we still need to go to advance the opportunities for all members of our profession. Following the panel presentation, we will have an open-forum discussion among the panel members and Council and to explore ways in which the OBA can provide leadership in promoting the advancement in the profession of our equity-seeking members. Based on the ideas brought forth by our panelists and Council members, we will propound a three-year action plan for the OBA to advance the issues discussed today. Once we have heard our panel and had discussion among our Council members, our Equal Opportunities Committee will be tasked with propounding recommendations for an action plan for the OBA to implement over the next three years.

Without further ado, I want to introduce our panel. I am pleased to be able to welcome all of you here today and we will look forward to hearing from all of you. Each of you is a recognized expert in your area and also brings personal experience to the discussion.

I will start my introductions to my immediate left – David Lepofsky, graduated from Osgoode Hall at York University in 1979, obtained his LLM from Harvard in 1982, and was admitted to the Bar of the Province of Ontario thereafter. He has practiced litigation law at the Ontario Government since that time. His areas of focus include constitutional, civil, administrative and criminal law. David and I first met in 1985 as opposing counsel, on a case involving one of his areas of expertise, freedom of speech and expression, and we have known one another for 25 years now, as a result of that first case. Since the 1970s, David has been very active in advocating for laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities. We have him to thank today for many changes resulting from his advocacy, including the requirement that the TTC and the Toronto bus system must announce the names of all stops, which is of assistance not only to the visually challenged in our society, but to us all. David is also a recipient of the Order of Canada and we are very proud of him and congratulate him for that.

Arlene Huggins, who will be our first speaker on the panel, is well known to most of you here. She graduated from the University of Toronto Faculty of Law in 1989, having previously obtained her Honours BA also from U of T. She was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1991. Her practice includes employment law, commercial leasing, litigation and mortgage enforcement. She acts for employers and employees and has extensive experience in negotiating and drafting employment contracts. She is a frequent speaker at the OBA and the Law Society. She has been a member of the OBA Council for many years, has served on the Executive, and is the Past Chair of the OBA's Equal Opportunities Committee, as well as the Past Chair of the CBA Standing Committee on Equity.

Our next speaker, Jeff Hewitt is General Counsel to Rama First Nation. He is a graduate of Osgoode Hall, at York University and was called to the Bar in 1998. Jeff's practice focuses on aboriginal law and aboriginal issues. He began his practice with Ruby & Edwardh in Toronto, moved to Weir & Foulds, then Aird & Berlis, before assuming his position as General Counsel to Rama First Nation in 2002. Jeff has just concluded a four year term as President of the Indigenous Bar Association of Canada.

Cynthia Peterson is a partner with Sack, Goldblatt, Mitchell. Prior to going into private practice, she taught at the University of Ottawa Law School. Her practice focuses primarily on human rights and Charter issues. Cynthia graduated from Queens University, Faculty of Law in 1989, obtained her LLM from Harvard in 1990, and was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1994. She has been involved in numerous ground breaking cases including *Jane Doe v Metropolitan Toronto Police* and many of the Supreme Court of Canada decisions involving LGBT issues. Cynthia is the Discrimination and Harassment Counsel for the Law Society of Upper Canada, and has assisted both lawyers and paralegals in resolving many complaints concerning discrimination and/or harassment in the legal profession. You may have seen an article recently, in the *Law Times*, with respect to some of the work that she has done.

Terrie-Lynne Devonish is Chief Legal Counsel at Aon Canada. She is responsible for providing legal advice and guidance to Aon in Canada. She was previously General Counsel at HSBC and, prior to that, was an associate at Fraser Milner. Terrie-Lynne graduated from Osgoode Hall at York University in 1995 and was called to the Bar in 1997. She is a member of the Black Business and Professional Association's national scholarship fund. She also provides legal services through PBLO's volunteer lawyer service program, and also mentors students in the Black Law Students' Association of Canada.

Milé Komlen obtained his B.A. from Carleton University in Law and Women's Studies and thereafter graduated from the University of Ottawa Law School. He pursued graduate studies in Human Rights Law at Carleton and is currently enrolled in a Master's program at McMaster University, studying globalization and the human condition. He is the Director of Human Rights and Equity at McMaster University. Prior to his appointment there, he was a Senior Diversity Consultant with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Since 2003, he has been a member of the Equity Advisory Group at the Law Society of Upper Canada, and its Chair since 2008.

I am pleased to welcome all of you here today to this important discussion, and anxious to hear what you have to say. Arlene will give us an overview first, followed by the rest of the panel.