



## Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature  
Third Session

Human Rights Day

Honourable Gene Zwozdesky  
Speaker  
MLA, Edmonton-Mill Creek

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## Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, today, as we mark the international declaration of Human Rights Day, let us be mindful and respectful that human rights belong equally to all and that many have died in attempting to achieve and/or to protect those rights as a fundamental component of the freedoms we enjoy. Amen.

Please be seated.

## Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a prestigious group of Albertans joining Citizens for a Civil Society and its flagship project, Daughters Day, in celebration of Human Rights Day, December 10. These Albertans have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, inspired by our common aspirations and democratic traditions that make human rights a way of life for all Albertans. As I say their names, I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Seated in the Speaker's gallery: Mita Das, president of Citizens for a Civil Society; Jack O'Neill, a recipient of the Order of Canada and former chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; Mary O'Neill, a former MLA for St. Albert; Elexis Schloss, a recipient of the Order of Canada, an advocate for the homeless, and a philanthropist; Muriel Stanley Venne, a recipient of the Order of Canada and the president and founder of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the 66th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights being adopted by the United Nations, and it is certainly a rare occasion that the House sits on December 10 and has an opportunity to recognize this important day. To share in this celebration, there are several prominent Albertans in attendance in the Speaker's gallery and the members' gallery. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six Albertans who have dedicated their lives to achieving the spirit of the universal declaration of human rights for all people: Alexis Antonakis, a volunteer with Jewish Family Services; Than Aung, a volunteer with the Burmese Cultural Society; Sonia Bitar, a former citizenship judge and volunteer with Changing Together; Jagdish Bhatia, a businessman; Tara Bhatia, a mentor; and Shreela Chakrabarty, a filmmaker. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several prominent Albertans in attendance in the members' gallery who are here with the Citizens for a Civil Society and its flagship project, Daughters Day. Citizens for a Civil Society is a registered nonprofit organization in Alberta that promotes and supports human rights and dignity. Daughters Day celebrates the lives, contributions, and achievements of all daughters.

Sixty-six years ago the United Nations adopted the universal declaration of human rights, the principles of which are enshrined in law through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the

Alberta Human Rights Act, and the Alberta Bill of Rights. December 10 is a day worthy of recognition in this Assembly, and to that end these Albertans, who have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, are here with us today. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Lan Chan-Marples, a facilitator and volunteer with Chinese community services and the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation; Earl Choldin, a human rights advocate; Satya Brata Das, cofounder of Daughters Day and the founder and principal of Cambridge Strategies Inc.; David Evans, a journalist; Soraya Hafez, a volunteer with the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton; and Charan Khehra, cofounder and chairperson of Daughters Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some additional guests from Citizens for a Civil Society, an Alberta nonprofit organization that, as you've heard, promotes and supports human rights and dignity. My guests are here today as well to celebrate the 66th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. These Albertans have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, inspired by our common aspiration and democratic traditions that make human rights a way of life for all Albertans.

Seated in the members' gallery are Cynthia Lazarenko, a volunteer with Seniors United Now; Danielle Monroe, a volunteer with ACT Alberta, a group that prevents human trafficking; Philomina Okeke, a professor of women and gender studies; Jitendra Shah, vice-president of CIBC Wood Gundy and president of the Mahatma Gandhi foundation for peace; Lori Sigurdson, manager, professional affairs, with the Alberta College of Social Workers; Rose Marie Tremblay, consultant and volunteer with Edmonton Social Planning Council; and Paula Kerman, photographer, writer, and social advocate. I would now like to ask all of my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

## Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

### Human Rights

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, 66 years ago the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the universal declaration of human rights. It was born out of the ashes of some of the most horrific crimes humanity has ever seen and stands as a document testifying to the most noble of ambitions: ensuring and maintaining the most basic of human rights for all people, groups from all nations, from all backgrounds. While the world since 1950 is still marked by horrific crimes against humanity and by nations still torn by war, I am proud to be part of a province and a country that continues the necessary work to achieve universal recognition of basic human rights across the world.

Here in Alberta we are lucky to have nonprofit groups like Citizens for a Civil Society to promote human rights and dignity along with community organizations like Daughters Day, who are committed to ending discrimination, violence, and human rights

abuses against all women. With their incredible contributions here in Alberta a growing volume of citizens are gathering together, working towards achieving a more inclusive and welcoming society inspired by our common aspirations and strong democratic traditions.

On the national and international stage we can all be proud of the initiatives taken by our federal government. Our Prime Minister continues to work toward saving the lives of the world's most vulnerable women and children through the maternal health initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that Canada is doing on the front lines to protect innocent women, children, and vulnerable peoples from the most inexplicable and horrific crimes by groups such as ISIL.

Mr. Speaker, let's take today to remember the unspeakable injustices that are committed against individuals and all of humanity while celebrating the achievements we have made and looking forward to the work that must still be done.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

### Human Rights in Alberta

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is international Human Rights Day, and this year's theme is Human Rights 365, encompassing the idea that every day is human rights day. But LGBTQ youth in Alberta face a fight for their basic human rights every day, and now this PC government doesn't have the respect to be honest about why at this point they're not protecting these rights.

The universal declaration of human rights was proclaimed 66 years ago today, yet unfortunately our Premier's understanding of human rights has not kept up. Let's be clear. There is no right to discriminate, not for governments, not for school boards, not for anyone. The Premier is hiding behind an outdated interpretation of our Constitution to get out of having to take a real position on LGBTQ rights. There is no right to discriminate. There is simply an acknowledgement that Catholic school boards may retain the religious character of their schools. No court has ever found that these rights extend to creating what is essentially a separate but equal, 1950s-style group of second-class citizens.

GSAs are separate, voluntary, extracurricular groups. In no way do they infringe on anyone else's rights or interfere with the school's religious character. The Premier's best defence is a case which draws from precedent set in jurisdictions with a different system and that, more importantly, is almost 30 years old, when

Charter rights were in their infancy. The law evolves, as does our province, even if this PC government won't.

Alberta's Catholic school boards themselves have said that they will not challenge a law protecting GSAs. There are no excuses left to avoid joining the 21st century. Alberta's LGBTQ youth have a right to a safe, inclusive education, a right to nondiscrimination, a right to dignity and respect. Today, on international Human Rights Day, this Premier needs to stop dodging the real issue and stand up for LGBTQ students in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

### Human Rights Day

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 10 is international Human Rights Day. Today we mark the anniversary of the signing of the universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations member states in 1948. Signing this important document meant that for the first time in history the universal protection of fundamental human rights was set out, providing a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations.

The slogan for this year's Human Rights Day is Human Rights 365. The United Nations has launched the campaign to promote the importance of human rights not only today, on Human Rights Day, but 365 days of the year. The campaign

celebrates the fundamental proposition in the Universal Declaration that each one of us, everywhere, at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights, that human rights belong equally to each of us and bind us together as a global community with the same ideals and values.

The Alberta Human Rights Act and the Alberta Bill of Rights are important pieces of legislation that help guarantee that all Albertans have the dignity and respect they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, in the 66 years since the universal declaration was signed, many advances have been made both here at home and around the globe to uphold the rights of women, minority communities, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, indigenous people, and many others. However, we are too often reminded that much work remains to be done to ensure that all human beings, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, where they are born and live, are afforded and protected by the same inalienable rights.

Mr. Speaker, a list of events being held across the province as well as more information about international Human Rights Day and the many ways Albertans can get involved is available on the Human Rights Commission website, [albertahumanrights.ab.ca](http://albertahumanrights.ab.ca).

Thank you.