



The legal framework which encourages diversity

Before 1947, people living in Canada were considered to be British subjects.

A new era began on January 1, 1947, when the Citizenship Act came into effect. Since then millions of immigrants have become Canadians, with no restrictions on their cultures, creeds or backgrounds.

In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation in Canada of the richness and variety of the country's cultural mosaic – and much has been done to protect it. The Bill of Rights, enacted in 1960, ensured that the rights and liberties of all Canadians were enshrined in the law. The Canadian Human Rights Act, passed in 1977, prohibited discrimination based on 'race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability, or conviction for an offence for

which a pardon has been granted.'

And the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982 and incorporated into the Constitution, specifies (in Section 27) that 'This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.'

However, the evolution of Canada into a genuinely multicultural society is still continuing. Canada's Minister of State for Multiculturalism recently announced that more legislation is in the pipeline designed to change current multicultural policies into laws.

According to the minister, the government proposes to:

- ❖ give full legislative recognition to Canada's cultural and racial diversity;
- ❖ provide the basic elements of a race relations strategy;
- ❖ stress public awareness and participation in overcoming prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination;
- ❖ recognise the need for all institutions to ensure equality of opportunity for all Canadians regardless of race, colour, age, religion or sex.

Legislation like this demonstrates Canada's wholehearted commitment to multiculturalism and the creation of a harmonious society in which any member of any group enjoys the same rights as every other Canadian.

Toronto's annual Caribana festival

