

HUMAN RIGHTS



File photo

Rosemary Brown faces a backlog of 250 complaints, plus more than 1,800 active cases, in her new role as head of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Racism a worry for new boss

The head of the Ontario Human Rights Commission is an activist, teacher, feminist and author.

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TORONTO — The drive to wipe out discrimination against women has won widespread support but the battle against racism doesn't look as promising, says the new head of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

"I see that as being much more difficult to deal with," says Rosemary Brown, 62, a social worker and ex-politician whose appointment to the commission was announced last month. "We've

nounced last month. "We've been at it a lot longer."

Brown, a human rights activist, teacher, feminist and author, takes over the commission at a time when complaints of racism and harassment are pouring in as never before.

There's a backlog of 250 complaints and more than 1,800 active cases, says acting chief commissioner Alok Mukherjee. Fifteen per cent of all cases are more than three years old.

Brown was most recently the head of Match International Centre, an Ottawa-based aid organization that supports social and economic projects to help women in Canada and the Third World.

The non-government agency has a staff of seven and an annual budget of \$350,000. In her new post, Brown will head a staff of 185 and handle a budget of \$12.4 million a year.

WAS MPP: Brown, who was born in Jamaica and has lived in Canada since 1950, retired from politics in 1986 after serving in the B.C. legislature for 14 years as a New Democrat. She ran for the federal party leadership in 1975, taking Ed Broadbent to four ballots, and was the first black woman to be elected to a federal or provincial office in Canada.

"She is known in B.C. politics as someone who works collegially and instils strong loyalty in fellow workers," said Colin Gabelmann, a long-time colleague and friend.

"She put together a leadership campaign team in 1975 that people still talk about," said Gabelmann, now B.C.'s attorney-general. "There's no question that if she were still in elected office here she'd be a cabinet minister."

While Brown sees racism rearing its ugly head in Ontario, she wouldn't say whether it will be her biggest challenge — she wants to wait until she's discussed the issues with the nine commissioners and others.

"I prefer to know what I'm talking about," she said.

She also refused to talk about her appointment as an accomplished fact. She has yet to appear before the standing committee on government agencies, which will review her nomination. The hearing will take place within the next 60 days.

But the committee has never rejected a nominee for this job, which pays \$90,000 to \$134,000 a year.