

The Carole Geller Award

Carole Geller, a dedicated, principled and tireless advocate for human rights, was a feminist and a supporter of the rights of Indigenous peoples. To honour Carole's contribution to progressive work in the human rights field over 20 years, the Carole Geller Human Rights Award was established in the fall of 1987. The award is given from time to time to support activists and advocates who make outstanding contributions to the advancement of human rights, and who stand up for those confronting sexism, racism, disability discrimination, poverty and colonial dominance.

Carole Geller began her work in the human rights field in 1967 when she was the President of the Manitoba Voice of Women. She became the first Director of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 1973, where she organized the commission and helped to design the most progressive human rights legislation in Canada at that time. She went to Toronto to study law in 1980 and in 1986 she was awarded her LL.M degree by York University. In 1985 became the first Director of the Pay Equity Bureau in Manitoba. Ms. Geller died of cancer in November 1987.

Carole Geller Award Recipients

Idle No More (2013)

The founders of Idle No More, four first Nations women from Saskatoon — Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdams, Nina Wilson, and Jessica Gordon — turned a Twitter hashtag, #idlenomore, into a national movement that has challenged Canada's failure to respect treaty and inherent Indigenous rights, and to protect the land and its resources.

The event that started the ball rolling was a rally in Saskatoon in November 2012 to protest the passage of Bill C-45 (a budget implementation bill), which stripped away environmental protections from most of Canada's rivers and lakes, and was passed without consultation with Indigenous peoples affected by it. The movement grew to encompass a much broader range of issues and attracted wide support from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Idle No More brought people together to defend indigenous sovereignty, the land and its resources, and democracy. It is an important and spontaneous movement to defend the human rights of Indigenous peoples.

Sharon McIvor (2007)

Sharon McIvor is one of Canada's leading Indigenous women rights experts and activists. Sharon is a Thompson Indian and a member of the Lower Nicola Band. She lives and works in Merritt, British Columbia, close to where she was born.

Ms. McIvor is a lawyer, with an LL.B. from the University of Victoria (1987) and an LL.M. from Queen's University (1995). She was a member of Justice Bertha Wilson's Panel on Gender Justice in the Legal Profession, a member of the Equality Rights Panel of the Court Challenges Program, and a member of the Aboriginal Circle of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. Sharon was a part of the leadership involved in

exposing the over-representation and the appalling treatment of Indigenous women in federal prisons in Canada. She helped to close down the Prison for Women in Kingston, and was a member of the Planning Council for the Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, the only facility designed for Indigenous women prisoners, which was based on Indigenous teachings and principles. In its early days, Sharon was the President of the Governing Council of the Healing Lodge.

Sharon was the Justice Co-ordinator of the Native Women's Association of Canada ("NWAC"), and she led the struggle during the Charlottetown Constitutional Talks to get NWAC a seat at the table and equal funding with other Indigenous organizations. Part of Sharon's life-long work has been to ensure a voice for Indigenous women as equal partners with Indigenous men in the struggle to end the injustices of colonization, racism and imposed patriarchy.

Ms. McIvor was the Co-Chair of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action ("FAFIA"), a national alliance of over seventy women's organizations that is dedicated to ensuring that Canada lives up to its international human rights commitments. Currently she is a member of FAFIA's Human Rights Committee and she appears before United Nations treaty bodies to report on discrimination against women in Canada, and Indigenous women in particular.

Sharon McIvor is a Professor of Indigenous Studies at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology where she teaches young Indigenous students about history, politics, colonization, and human rights.

Ms. McIvor was the plaintiff in *McIvor v. Canada*, 2009 BCCA 153, a ground-breaking constitutional challenge to the sex discrimination in the status registration provisions of the *Indian Act*. Thousands of First Nations women and their descendants have been excluded from registration as status Indians, because, since its introduction, the *Indian Act*, favoured male Indians and their descendants over female Indians and their descendants. Sharon was partially successful in this case, and the Government of Canada amended the *Indian Act* in 2010 to provide new eligibility for registration to about 45,000 First Nations women and their descendants. However, many are still left out, and because of this, Ms. McIvor has filed a petition with the United Nations Human Rights Committee, continuing her effort to fully and finally eradicate the sex discrimination from the *Indian Act*.

The Carole Geller Award was given to Sharon McIvor to honour her many contributions to the struggle for equality and social justice in Canada and to thank her for her determination to ensure that justice is delivered to First Nations women and their descendants.

Dissent on Trial (2005)

Dissent on Trial was a group formed as a result of arrests made on June 28, 2003 when hundreds of people participated in a protest against the World Trade Organization ("WTO") mini-Ministerial meeting in Montreal. This meeting preceded the WTO Ministerial Council trade talks that collapsed in Cancun, Mexico in September 2003.

The arrests took place two hours after the march had ended and dispersed, and two kilometres from the site of location of the march in the allegedly "safe" green zone. Those arrested, some 200 individuals, were surrounded by police and not allowed to disperse. All were arrested and detained.

Despite the lack of evidence, the Crown is proceeding with charges of unlawful assembly, a criminal charge. This charge, if successful, will set Canadian precedent that will limit peoples' ability to march, picket and protest. It will also result in criminal records for the many people who were unjustly arrested.

The deliberateness of the violation of rights, the apparent determination of Quebec authorities to proceed with criminal charges make this case a critical one. The resolve of *Dissent on Trial* to challenge these false charges made them a worthy recipient of the award.

Democracy Street (1998)

The students in this organization contributed twice to the protection of human rights. First, they made a contribution to the protection and promotion of human rights by drawing attention, at the November 1997 Vancouver APEC Conference, to the massive violations of human rights by the Indonesian dictator Suharto, and to the negative impacts of globalization on people around the world. They made a second contribution through their efforts to hold the RCMP accountable for pepper spraying, arresting and strip-searching demonstrators. The Carole Geller Award was a contribution to legal costs for a B.C. Supreme Court challenge to police conduct and for the costs of legal representation at the RCMP Public Complaints Commission.

Billie Mortimer (1995)

Ms. Mortimer was responsible for exposing the practice of Japan Airlines in 1992 of seating passengers of East Indian origin at the back of their planes. Ms. Mortimer's efforts to expose and end the practice met with resistance from her fellow union members and officials who feared the possible loss of jobs. Ms. Mortimer was obliged to go to the media with the story. The practice was eventually ended by JAL who issued a public apology. Ms. Mortimer was widely recognized within the East Indian and anti-racist communities in Vancouver for her initiative.

Protectors of Mother Earth (1993)

This organization successfully fought the practice of clear-cutting and use of mechanical harvesters and halted access to part of a forest at Wiggins Bay, Saskatchewan which has provided livelihood for generations of Indigenous peoples.