

For immediate release

CMHR Board announces immediate departure of CEO

Winnipeg – June 25, 2020 – The Board of Trustees of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) has announced immediate action to address recent allegations of systemic racism, discrimination and claims of sexual harassment at the Museum.

“These allegations were not properly escalated to the Board of Trustees,” said Board Chair Pauline Rafferty. “Now that we have a more complete understanding of these events, we are taking immediate action and will undertake long-term steps to address these issues.”

The Board and CMHR President & CEO Dr. John Young have agreed that it is in the best interest of the Museum that he step down, effective immediately. Rafferty has agreed to lead the organization as Interim CEO until a new CEO is in place.

“We will act quickly to improve Museum processes and our policies, and to rebuild relationships and trust with our staff and those we have let down, especially the Black and Indigenous communities, people of colour and LGBTQ2+ communities,” stated Rafferty. “We apologize unreservedly for what has happened and we know that the fight against systemic racism, homophobia, inequality and all forms of othering must be ongoing, and must be a priority.”

An external, third-party review of the Museum led by Laurelle Harris is already underway. Harris is a highly qualified specialist on issues of human rights, equity and inclusion. The review will examine the Museum’s policies, practices and workplace culture for the purpose of addressing claims of systemic oppression.

The scope of the initial review will be on experiences with systemic racism and other forms of discrimination, along with the censorship of LGBTQ2+ content, shared by current and former CMHR staff up until June 22, 2020. This initial review will be followed by a comprehensive, institution-wide examination of all Museum policies and practices and will enable current and former staff to share additional experiences. The preliminary findings of the third-party report will be received by July 31, 2020. The report will provide recommendations which will inform meaningful cultural change within the Museum.

The Board has also established a new Diversity and Inclusion Committee chaired by Trustee Julie Jai, who is a former member of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario and has extensive experience in reconciliation and human rights issues. This Committee will act swiftly on the findings of Harris’s report and has committed to sharing results and recommendations.

“In the meantime, we understand that we have work to do now,” Rafferty said. “As part of that work, the Board will be engaging with the Museum’s staff to hear their experiences and better understand their concerns. We will also be reaching out to partners and sponsors to hear their perspectives, reiterate our support for human rights and consider solutions as we move forward.

“We know the past two weeks have been difficult for the Museum’s staff and volunteers, its members, donors, and the community – and we apologize for that. This is especially true for all those who look to the Museum as a place dedicated to human rights, to building understanding, promoting respect, and encouraging reflection. We recognize that we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard.

“Finally, the Board of Trustees would like to thank the many Museum employees who have worked tirelessly and who strive to uphold the Museum’s values every single day.”

The Board has committed to providing updates, ongoing communication and accountability as the Museum works to move forward with the steps needed to bring about real and lasting change, Rafferty said.

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