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CANADA PRIDES ITSELF AS A NATION that advocates for human rights, and, as such, one would think that its domestic human rights institutions are also held in high regard. However, the public institutions of Canada's human rights system have been the subject of much debate and criticism. In "Speaking Out on Human Rights," Pearl Eliadis suggests that Canada's human rights institutions have become "lightening rods for high expectations and strongly voiced frustrations," and little attention has been paid to their positive contributions.[2] Rather than look at how we might learn from past mistakes or address ongoing criticisms, some critics suggest these institutions are no longer needed at all.

The author's project started when she had a few informal conversations with people who have been at the forefront of the human rights movement. Ultimately, sixty interviews were conducted over four years. Eliadis indicates that the common thread in these interviews is that each person was committed to a constructive and progressive vision of human rights and the systems that help protect and reinforce them. The aim of the book is to engage a general audience in a consideration of issues that may only have been considered previously in overheated, popularized rhetoric. Given that many of these issues are ultimately understood and resolved in the legal realm, the author, a lawyer by trade, admits to using a legal lens. However, readers with little or no legal knowledge are given all the tools they need to follow along.

The book has six parts. In part one, the author provides an introduction to Canada's human rights system—types of institutions, features of the system, and how Canada's system fits in an international context. "Human rights system"

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1. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) 429 pages.
2. *Ibid* at xx.

refers to the collection of institutions with the specific statutory mandate of protecting and promoting human rights. In Canada, the primary institutions are human rights commissions and human rights tribunals.

In part two, the author looks back at how Canada's human rights system has developed. First-generation systems were full of idealism and hope, but soon there was concern about delay, inadequate legal powers, and backlog. In trying to understand why there was a shift to second-generation systems, the author also points to the advent of the *Charter*, a more complex understanding of what constitutes discrimination and equality, and the realization that individual complaints do not necessarily result in systemic change. The author suggests that not all reforms have been successful and human rights systems today remain vulnerable.

In part three, the author argues that we still have a need for these institutions. Eliadis addresses arguments that human rights systems only deal with frivolous claims and that they are undemocratic—the latter being a critique made by Prime Minister Harper himself. Further, some critics suggest that we need a laissez-faire approach to regulating discrimination, to which Eliadis responds, "it is not … especially helpful or realistic to envisage the world as a marketplace where the invisible hand regulates human rights as it does pork belly futures."[3]

Part four explores whether human rights systems are fair, impartial, and competent. The author admits that Canada's human rights system suffers from legal and procedural deficiencies. For example, only half of the commissions in Canada are allowed by their statutes to speak about human rights that go beyond discrimination. This limiting of human rights institutions' legal powers is troubling. In part five, the author explores this particular shortcoming in more detail. By using examples such as hate speech and immigration, Eliadis shows that equality and discrimination complaints will regularly engage with other rights and freedoms. Where other rights and freedoms are implicated, they cannot be ignored.

In part six, Eliadis concludes by providing ten ideas for change with twenty-two corresponding recommendations. These ideas fall in line with the arguments she makes throughout the book. Eliadis realizes that the most coherent solution would be to harmonize Canada's entire human rights system by creating a single national human rights law and institution, but this is unlikely to happen. Instead, she suggests that with these changes there can be an attempt to re-establish the public's trust in human rights systems in Canada, while also allowing these institutions to do their work more effectively.

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3.   *Ibid* at 155.

Speaking Out on Human Rights would be an enlightening read for either those who champion or question Canada's human rights system. The author's suggestions for incremental change are powerful in that they break down Canada's human rights system's shortcomings into manageable issues. Throughout this book, Eliadis effectively faces critics of Canada's human rights institutions by illuminating their positive contributions while also pointing to criticisms as a driving force for reform.