

Rosalie Silberman Abella

Rosalie Silberman Abella was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004 after 12 years as a justice on the Ontario Court of Appeal. She is the first Jewish woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court. After graduating from the University of Toronto Law School in 1970, she practised civil and criminal litigation until, at the age of 29 (1976) she was appointed to the Ontario Family Court. This makes her Canada's youngest (and first pregnant) person to be appointed to the Bench. She chaired the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the Ontario Law Reform Commission, and the Study on Access to Legal Services by the Disabled. She was a member of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Premier's Advisory Committee on Confederation, the Ontario Public Service Labour Relations Tribunal, the University of Toronto Academic Discipline Tribunal, and the Canadian Judicial Council's Inquiry on Donald Marshall, Jr.

She was sole Commissioner and author of the 1984 federal Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, in which she created the term and concept of "employment equity", a new strategy for reducing barriers in employment faced by women, aboriginal people, non-whites, and persons with disabilities. The theories of "equality" and "discrimination" she developed in her Report were adopted by the Supreme Court of Canada in its first decision dealing with equality rights under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Report has been implemented by the governments of Canada, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and South Africa.

She has written over 90 articles and written or co-edited four books on a variety of legal topics. She has given several hundred lectures and speeches extensively in Canada and internationally. As the Boulton Visiting Professor at the McGill Law School for four years, she taught advanced courses in constitutional law, administrative law, human rights and civil liberties, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and jurisprudence, and was a Distinguished Visiting Faculty lecturer at the University of Toronto Law School for three years, teaching courses on the judicial role in a democracy, human rights and civil liberties, and comparative jurisprudence. Justice Abella is a specially elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a Senior Fellow at Massey College.

Justice Abella was a Trustee of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada and a director of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, of the International Commission of Jurists, and of the Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice. She co-chaired the 1992 Constitutional Conferences and moderated the 1988 English language Leaders' Debate. She was a member of the Atkinson Foundation Fellowship in Public Policy Selection Committee, a judge of the Giller Literary Prize, and is a graduate of The Royal Conservatory of Music in classical piano.

Justice Abella has been very active in Canadian judicial education, organizing the first judicial seminar in which all levels of the judiciary participated, the first judicial seminar in which persons outside the legal profession were invited to participate, the first national education program for administrative tribunals, and the first national conference for Canada's female judges.

She has 24 honorary degrees and is the only woman to receive the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. Justice Abella was awarded the 2003 International Justice Prize of the Peter Gruber Foundation and the 2004 Walter S. Tarnopolsky Award for Human Rights by the Canadian Bar Association and the International Commission of Jurists, and was selected as the 2004-2005 Robert Anderson Fellow at Yale Law School. In 2007, she was made an Honourary Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Justice Abella was born on July 1, 1946 in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany and came to Canada as a refugee in 1950. She is married to Canadian history professor Irving Abella and they have two sons, Jacob and Zachary, both lawyers.

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