



News Release

Privacy protection must be part of Vancouver Olympic Games planning, say federal and B.C. Privacy Commissioners

VICTORIA, February 2, 2009 – The Privacy Commissioner of Canada and the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia say that security and law enforcement agencies have to find the right balance between security requirements and privacy for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

“Ensuring the security of Olympic venues, and the safety of athletes and the public, is of the utmost importance,” says Privacy Commissioner of Canada Jennifer Stoddart. “We recognize that special events like this demand special security,” adds her colleague, B.C. Commissioner David Loukidelis, “but privacy remains important.”

Commissioner Stoddart agrees, adding that: “In a democratic society, such as Canada, a government’s duty to keep citizens safe must be tempered by the values that underpin our way of life. That is why the right to privacy must be upheld, even during mega-events like the Olympic Games, where the threat to security is higher.”

The two Commissioners are speaking today at an Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada workshop – Privacy, Security and the 2010 Olympics. The workshop is gathering together experts from academia, civil society, the private sector and government to discuss the privacy and security implications associated with hosting the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver.

Both Commissioners have long taken the position that the right to privacy should only be forfeited where there are no other, less privacy-invasive security measures, which could achieve the same ends. Commissioner Stoddart says there is a need to consider the privacy impacts of widespread and highly sophisticated surveillance systems in use during the Olympics, but especially the legacy of such security measures after the Games.

“Experience has shown that Olympic Games and other mega-events can leave a troubling legacy – large-scale, security surveillance systems installed for mega-events often remain long after the event is over,” she says.

What happened following the Athens Games of 2004 is a case in point. Closed-circuit cameras installed for the Games were left in place afterwards to help law enforcement monitor citizens, notably during public demonstrations.

“Our hope is that Vancouver-area residents will not wind up surrounded by surveillance systems they neither want nor need. This would be an unfortunate legacy of the 2010 Games,” says Commissioner Loukidelis.

The two Commissioners have discussed security and privacy issues for the Games and will collaborate in monitoring security measures and privacy protections, in order to ensure that privacy rights are fully respected during the Games and after.

The workshop on Privacy, Security and the 2010 Olympics runs from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. today at the Victoria Conference Centre.

To attend the workshop, or for media interview requests, journalists should contact:

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