

The Globe and Mail

©1989 The Globe and Mail

146th YEAR, NO. 43,547 ■ FRIDAY, JUNE 30, 1989

□□

NEWS

Justice system called racist

Canada's justice system is dominated by whites who keep racial minorities out of top jobs and even off juries, a justice system conference in Halifax was told. A4

System excludes minorities, lawyer says

BY KEVIN COX
The Globe and Mail

HALIFAX

The Canadian justice system is dominated by whites who exclude racial minorities from positions as judges, prosecutors or even serving on juries, a Halifax lawyer says.

"In Nova Scotia, you rarely find a black man or a black woman on a jury. It's unheard of, it's unthinkable," Davies Bagambirre told a conference on the criminal justice system yesterday.

He said that the screening process used for jurors makes it very difficult for black people to be selected, especially when most lawyers and judges involved in the process are white.

Mr. Bagambirre told reporters after his speech that he expects there will be legal challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to trials in which the accused was not white and was tried by an all-white jury.

He told the conference that the justice system is not adjusting to the fact that in 25 years white people will be a minority in Canada.

And while the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is now actively recruiting racial minorities, Mr. Bagambirre said it will not change the way non-whites are dealt with by the courts.

"There's no sense having 10 black women in the RCMP and 20 white prosecutors handling the prosecution. The people before whom the accused appears — the judges in Nova Scotia — are 99.9 per cent white," he said.

While blacks are not well represented in the justice system, they make up a disproportionate number of the people charged by police with minor offences, or who are involved in scuffles with police, said Esmeralda Thornhill, education officer with Quebec Human Rights Commission.

Ms Thornhill said blacks and native people often receive the harshest sentences from judges and are often victims of police using excessive force.