

*Citation read on the occasion of the granting of the degree of*

*Honorary Doctor of Laws to*

***The Honourable Lance Finch***

*by the Senate of the University of Victoria*

*June 10, 2015*

Madam Chancellor, it is my privilege to introduce Lance Sidney George Finch.

Since 1982 and the revisions to the Canadian Constitution of that year, courts have come to play a more central role in the social, economic and cultural life of this country. In that environment a blending of qualities of expert knowledge, professionalism, integrity, wisdom, balanced judgement and compassion are important in the judicial persona. Lance Finch embodies all of those attributes.

He got a good start in life. Born in Edmonton his family had the good sense to move to Victoria where Lance received his high school and college education. His association with this institution is a strong one as he studied at Victoria College from 1955 to 1958. Not one to only hit the books, however, the young Finch took to the basketball court as well, and played on the Vikes team that won the 1958 Canadian Junior Men's Championship.

The future jurist graduated LL.B. from the University of British Columbia in 1962. He was called to the bar in 1963 and embarked on a distinguished career as counsel in the well-respected Vancouver firm of Guild Yule. In 1983 he was appointed a justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia and in 1993 to the Court of Appeal. He was appointed to head that court as Chief Justice of British Columbia and the Yukon in 2001. He retired from the Bench in 2013.

The outline of a distinguished career does not, of course, demonstrate the mark an individual has made within a chosen field of endeavour or wider community. With Lance Finch it is not at all difficult to take that further step. In his work as a judge he has been applauded for his integrity, wisdom, judgement and compassion, as well as for his skill, and, as Chief Justice as an effective and principled leader. But his influence does not end there. As one of his nominator's noted, Lance Finch "has been especially concerned with the impact of the law on the less advantaged members of society . . . He has spoken eloquently, and with passion on the challenge of access to justice and has been a tireless advocate of lawyers' responsibilities to assist those without the means to access legal services."

During the Chief Justice's careers a sea of change has taken place in Canada on the law relating to Indigenous title and rights, and how these might best be accommodated within the Canadian

law and governance. The courts have played a central role in this process, one that has required sensitivity, resourcefulness, an understanding of the country and its history, and an appreciation of how the common law can and should respond to the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous social organization. Nowhere have the challenges been greater than in British Columbia. One of the Chief Justice's significant contributions to justice has been his leadership of the court through the litigation of these often complex issues. In that role his sensitivity is best summed up in a remark he made at the U Vic Conference in 2003 celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark decision on Aboriginal title in *Calder v. Attorney General of British Columbia*. Quoting the distinguished Canadian constitutional scholar and poet, Frank Scott, the Chief Justice said:

*If human rights and harmonious relations between cultures are forums of the beautiful, then the state is a work of art that is never finished.*

The award of this honorary degree to Chief Justice Finch, one of our own, jibes well with the priorities and commitments of the University of Victoria to exploring the social context of law; to consideration of the disadvantaged and their full participation in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and to taking Indigenous cultures seriously. Madam Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Lance Finch for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

Written and presented by  
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