

## **B.C. mulling charges against polygamist sect**

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### **CBC News**

A polygamist community in Bountiful, B.C., is again at the centre of a political and legal controversy as the province is looking at filing criminal charges.

Bountiful is home to a fundamentalist Mormon sect that continues to practise polygamy, which is illegal in Canada.

B.C. Attorney General Wally Oppal told CBC News that taking action against the community is one of his top priorities.

"I would expect we will have some kind of answer within the next week or so as to whether or not we'll be laying charges," he said.

Church leaders in Bountiful insist young girls are never forced into a marriage they don't want. But Oppal said their claim could be tested soon in a criminal courtroom.

Oppal's comments came after the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal found it doesn't have the authority to hear a complaint against the provincial government, which was accused of failing to protect young girls from sexual exploitation.

Jancis Andrews, one of the women who filed the human rights complaint three years ago, alleges the province had a policy not to prosecute men in Bountiful for polygamy or the sexual exploitation of young girls.

"I wanted women's rights upheld," Andrews told CBC News. "And I don't think any civilized country should have concubines and harems among its populace, which of course is what Bountiful is doing."

### **Complaint dismissed by tribunal**

Andrews said the Crown should have charged male church members who illegally married girls as young as 15.

But the tribunal dismissed the complaint, saying it has no jurisdiction over decisions made by Crown counsel.

"It's more than disappointing," Andrews said. "I personally find it frightening that even the Charter of Rights and Freedoms cannot be enforced in Bountiful."

But Oppal applauded the tribunal's decision and dismissed Andrews's claims the province was indifferent to the matter.

"They were alleging we weren't taking a serious enough approach to the polygamist issues that are said to exist there, and that's just wrong."

Former church leader Winston Blackmore could not be reached for comment.

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2007/05/10/polygamy-community.html>