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Shaheen Azmi, director of policy, education, monitoring, and outreach of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, addresses members of the Thunder Bay Police Services Board, senior officers the executive of the Thunder Bay Police Association.

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Efforts to improve relations between Thunder Bay police and the city's indigenous community continued this week with an address to police by a senior official with the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The Thunder Bay Police Service is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan at the urging last fall of the commission that "may lead to diminished tensions between the indigenous community and members of your service."

In a joint statement Wednesday, the two organizations said the goal is to "provide organizational change and improved service delivery for all members of the community."

“The human rights component will be one of key elements of this plan,” the statement said. “The development of this plan will also benefit from the OIPRD’s systemic review.”

The Office of the Independent Police Review Director is investigating the department after “alarming questions” were raised about the way it investigates the disappearances and deaths of indigenous people, said OIPRD director Gerry McNally last year.

That investigation centres on how police handled the death of one of seven remote First Nation students attending school in Thunder Bay between 2000 and 2011.

On Monday the police services board, members of senior command-administration along with the executive of the Thunder Bay Police Association participated in an educational session presented by Shaheen Azmi, director of policy, education, monitoring, and outreach of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Azmi provided an overview and examples of how projects aimed at change within organizations can address the gaps and human rights concerns which exist between police and the public.

Police services board chair Jackie Dojack said, “The insights and knowledge provided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission will be extremely valuable to our change project. We have a responsibility to all members of community and in particular, we will work with the indigenous community to improve our relationships.”

Chief J.P. Levesque called Monday’s session “an important step in helping us recognize the issues regarding humans rights and assisting us in developing a change project within our organization. We have a great deal of meaningful work ahead and I am confident that the members of this service and our community will work together for a common good.”

Chris Adams, police communications director and president of the Thunder Bay Senior Officers Association said, “The success of this important project will require compassion and the ability to listen to the concerns of the community. As leaders, we are committed to this change.”

Greg Stephenson, president of the Thunder Bay Police Association said the union “welcomes the additional training and assistance being provided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. We are committed to all human rights and diversity concerns from within the Thunder Bay Police Service to our interactions with all members of our community.

As we move ahead, we look forward to working with the Thunder Bay Police Service and the Ontario Human Rights Commission to ensure these obligations are achieved.”

The formation of our formal plan continues, the joint statement said. “Updates and a formal announcement of the content of the plan will be made in the next few months. We are committed to the improvement of our relationships with the indigenous community and the increase of our cultural competencies for all those we serve,” it concluded.