

UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

March 21st is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this day in 1960, 69 people were killed in Sharpeville, South Africa when police opened fire on hundreds of protesters who peacefully demonstrated against apartheid's "pass laws". This legislation was designed to segregate the population along racial lines, regulating the movements of all non-white citizens, and further debasing their status as citizens. In 1966 this day of massacre was proclaimed after the international community was called upon by the United Nations General Assembly to strengthen its efforts and build solidarity to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

This day reminds us that we still have a lot of work ahead to ensure equality among all peoples in the world community. As we see rising unemployment in these times of economic crisis, there are severe repercussions for already marginalized populations across the globe who continue to face multiple barriers due to discrimination. We see evidence of this in our own country, where racism is still inherent in discriminatory laws; inequities within the criminal justice system; poor access to health care, education, housing, and social services; disparities in economic and employment opportunities; and social exclusion of racialized and Aboriginal people.

Eliminating discrimination in the workplace and beyond is a top priority for the labour movement. Racism and xenophobia contradicts and undermines our union's struggle for equality, inclusiveness and social justice. Though eradicating all forms of discrimination in the workplace is a key challenge facing the trade union movement today, the Public Service Alliance of Canada is committed to continuing our anti-discrimination work both within our organization and beyond. As part of our fight for social justice, we call on the Canadian government to make a real commitment to end systemic discrimination by supporting the Kelowna Accord; signing onto the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and by reconsidering its shameful boycott of the United Nations Conference to Eliminate Racism.

Promoting respect for diversity needs to take place at all levels of our lives. It is a conscious choice we make every day, in everything we do. Despite the challenges of past and present, we have also seen the differences that can be made if we join in solidarity together and consciously take collective actions to ensure that equality, dignity and justice is had by all. Let's build on our victories, and move forward to build a world that we are all proud of.