



Joint Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD) 2023

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD) we recommit to fighting racial discrimination, dismantling systems of oppression, and promoting a just society.

March 21, 2023 is the 63rd anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, when police opened fire on unarmed Black South Africans peacefully demonstrating against racist “pass” laws, and killed and injured hundreds of people. In 1966, the United Nations General Assembly marked this day to recognize the injustices at Sharpeville and the ongoing fight to eliminate racial discrimination. March 21st is now commemorated as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Our movement has been focused on challenging discrimination for many decades. In 1947 the Toronto Joint Labour Committee on Human Rights was formed. It led a relentless campaign against racist practices by employers, landlords and businesses, and its legacy is recognized through the annual Bromley Armstrong Awards. In 1975, the Labour Council helped establish the Urban Alliance on Race Relations. In 1982, Labour Community Services was founded under the umbrella of the Labour Council and the United Way and connects unions and community in tackling poverty, injustice and racism.

Our three organizations work to fight systemic and direct oppression of racialized people through various means. The Urban Alliance on Race Relations works primarily and proactively with the community, public and private sectors to provide educational programs and research, which are critical in addressing racism in society. The Toronto & York Region Labour Council tackles inequities within the labour movement, advocates for societal change, and aims for political transformation especially at the municipal level; we work with racialized workers to build and hold power through programs like the Indigenous and Workers of Colour conference, and other spotlights on workers of colour who are making change. Together with Labour Community Services, the Labour Council promotes racial justice through the Yes It Matters campaign, and The Refugees Next Door campaign; and we celebrate excellence through the Bromley Armstrong Awards. This is movement work, and we recognize both the gains that have been made and the challenges still before us.

While IDERD recognizes a horrific event at an international level, much of our work to challenge racism is done at the local level. Last year the labour movement and community helped to elect a more visibly and culturally-representative Toronto City Council than ever before, including progressive new Black Councillors in Etobicoke, Scarborough and downtown, the first hijab-wearing Muslim woman elected to public office in Canada, a Chilean refugee, and a young progressive Asian Councillor. Shamefully, the

new strong-mayor powers significantly reduced their ability to achieve the substantial changes they were elected to make.

Despite visible evidence of Torontonians' appetite for a progressive agenda that would reflect all communities in the City – in other words, paying real attention to the needs of racialized residents – the 2023 budget ignored these needs and demands. We know that COVID disproportionately and negatively affected racialized people. Yet as we emerge from the pandemic, these communities continue to be left behind, disproportionately affected by real program and service cuts, by the homelessness and affordability crisis, and over-policed by an inflated police budget.

The ability of the new Councillors to have a positive impact on the 2022 budget was seriously curtailed by the shortened and fundamentally-altered budget process. Elected to speak for communities often pushed to the margins, they were unable to do so.

Further, we are missing the mark on Community Benefits Agreements that identify racialized workers as key targets, social procurements that do the same, and hirings at the local level.

As we move our analysis out from the municipal level, we see that a disproportionate number of students of colour drop out or are pushed out of the education system. Children from families of colour are over-represented in the custody of children's aid societies. Black and Indigenous people are incarcerated way beyond their representation in the population.

Whether we are union, community or individuals, we must continue the fight for racial equity in Toronto. We must continue the fight for racial equity in York Region too.

This work must be relentless if we are to succeed.

We came together because we have a vision. Knowing that the Canada we want is achievable, only strengthens our resolve as we work to achieve the elimination of all forms of racism and discrimination.