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Statements

BCFED Statement on Black History Month

The following is a statement from Irene Lanzinger, president of the BC Federation of Labour.

“The month of February 2017 marks the 20th anniversary of the celebration of Black History Month in Canada.

As we continue to bear witness to the ongoing struggle for equitable treatment of black people in our communities, we are reminded not only of black leaders and activists in society of decades past, but of black leaders and activists who are making history today.

Black activists stand on the front lines in the fight against inequality. Many more are leaders in the Black Lives Matter Movement. Others fight for change as anti-oppression educators, artists, and as journalists chronicling these powerful narratives.

These activist and leaders are educating the public and thus inspiring change. It is important that we continue to advocate to change, both provincially and federally, the systems in place that perpetuate structural racism and inequality.

A recent Statistics Canada study found that black Canadians earn on average 10% to 15% less than white Canadians workers. The Toronto Star says that in Brampton/Mississauga region of Ontario, black people are three times more likely to be carded by police.

The sobering reality of over-representation of black people in prisons is chronicled in a 2016 report of federal prisons' watchdog Howard Sapers: there are 70% more black people in federal prisons now than there were a decade ago. We must work to change this reality.

And south of the border, solidarity compels us to acknowledge and understand the racial, economic, and social inequality and inequity black people in the USA face. The black population in the US is 12% to 13%, but their representation in the prison population is 37%. Black men make 25% less than white American men, and black women make 36% less than white men.

And according to the Washington Post, almost 500 black people were shot and killed by police in the United States in the last two years.

In the face of these harsh realities, the BCFED on behalf of over 500,000 working people in BC and their families, is committed to work with the black leaders in educating the public on these issues, to continue providing space for critical conversations to be had, and to continue to stand in solidarity with the black community in the struggle for equity.

This month let us celebrate not only the figures who have helped pave the way for the black history makers of today. Let us also celebrate the modern-day heroes who are paving the way for the history makers of tomorrow."