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Releases

Statement from President Irene Lanzinger on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The following is a statement from BC Federation of Labour President Irene Lanzinger on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

On March 21 every year, the world turns its attention to the issue of racial discrimination in our communities.

According to Statistics Canada, in BC almost four out of every ten people in the province identify as a visible minority or as Indigenous, meaning almost forty percent of BC's residents are at risk of experiencing racial discrimination every day.

When we talk about racial discrimination, it's not always racial slurs uttered on public transit, and it doesn't always involve snide comments made on the shop floor, or spray-painted hate speech across establishments owned or operated by Black, Indigenous or People of Colour.
In workplaces, racial discrimination most often takes on a more subtle, insidious form. It exists in the lack of people of colour in workplaces, leading often to tokenization of one person of colour. This leads to that worker feeling isolated, unsafe, and even under attack in the workplace.

It is apparent in the constant habit of employers hiring more and more non-visible minorities into workplaces when applicants who are visible minorities have equal skill level. It is apparent in the way workers who are visible minorities have their work challenged while their colleagues do not, and in the way Black, Indigenous and Workers of Colour are often left out of conversations in the workplace.

In our communities, racial discrimination becomes apparent in the lack of housing offered to visible minorities and Indigenous people, the amount of references requested of those individuals in order to obtain housing, and the types of privacy invasions they are subjected to by landlords.

In leadership circles in the province of BC and on corporate boards, the diverse nature of our province's population is not reflected. This is a significant problem. Without representation in the appropriate sectors, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour will
not feel safe to come forward with the injustices that they face in the workplace, in agencies, or in their communities.

The re-establishment of the BC Human Rights Commission is a good first step toward ensuring just representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour in positions of influence provincewide. The federation looks forward to working with the commission on educating the public on this and other issues.

The BC Liberals targeted visible minorities and Indigenous people in BC for 16 years. They stacked the deck in our labour laws against them by gutting good-paying, health-sector jobs that were predominantly filled by women of colour. They stacked the deck by allowing contract flipping that lets employers pay poverty level wages with no benefits. The BCFED is working hard to lobby the provincial government for labour law changes that will create justice for Black, Indigenous and Workers of Colour in workplaces in BC.

We must have a comprehensive strategy to eradicate racial discrimination from this province and we must be diligent in following it. We must see just representation of visible minorities in all workplaces across the province, on corporate boards and in leadership circles. The time has come to level the playing field for Black, Indigenous, and Workers of Colour in British Columbia, and the BCFED is committed to helping make that happen.