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Statements

# BCFED statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The following is a statement from BCFED President Irene Lanzinger:

“This year, on March 21st, we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination with a message on behalf of the 500,000 union members in this province and their families. To truly understand the impact of racial discrimination, we need to make space for people of colour in our unions and governing bodies. Through inclusion we can hear the stories of people of colour, and learn from them what strategies to use to tackle racism in our society.

The United Nations theme for this year’s International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is “Racial profiling and incitement to hatred, including in the context of migration.” When looking to our neighbours in the United States and the election of Donald Trump, we can see the influence of hate speech and bigotry here with the recent rise of racist incidents in our province. We are forced to take note of the amount of influence hateful speech in the media and perpetuated by leaders in both the USA and Canada has emboldened bigots on our side of the border as much as down south.

We must be vigilant in denouncing racial profiling, in denouncing anti-immigrant sentiment, when we hear it being repeated in our communities. We must also strive to make our communities, our workplaces, and our organizations welcoming places for all people.

Racialized workers are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs, have a much harder time gaining access to the justice system, and face more barriers to migration than other workers. The BC Federation of Labour is working to raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour in this province to help these workers—and all low-wage workers—acquire a standard of living above the poverty line.

One of the most effective ways to combat racial discrimination in workplaces is through organizing unions, collectively bargaining working conditions so that employers and workplaces adhere to human rights, and having effective grievance procedures for when issues do arise in the workplace. Unions can provide workers experiencing racism and other forms of discrimination with a safe place in which they participate with dignity and become empowered.

This March 21st, the BCFED calls on workers to mobilize to ensure that better happens for racialized workers in our province, and that British Columbians elect a government that will raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour, protect workers' right to organize their workplace into unions, uphold their right to collectively bargain, and make sure that the BC Labour Relations Board is a fair and just place to handle arbitration of grievances. Though we recognize March 21st as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we also feel strongly that we must remain vigilant against discrimination every day, to make BC a fair and equitable province for all, especially those most marginalized."