

UN Committee Questions Canada's Record on Anti-Racism

Geneva / August 15, 2017 / - Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change (COP-COC) and several of its co-founding members were successful in having Canada vigorously questioned on its record on addressing racial discrimination by a UN human rights Committee at its review of Canada today in Geneva.

The civil society groups were in attendance at Canada's review by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

The Committee questioned Canada on the existence of an Action Plan Against Racism and the collection of race-based disaggregated data, systemic racism in immigration law and policy, racial discrimination in employment and anti-Black racism in criminal justice, child welfare and in the area of education – all priorities flagged for their attention by the civil society groups.

In 2005, Canada adopted Canada's Action Plan Against Racism (CAPAR), arising from the Declaration and Program of Action of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR). A key obligation from WCAR was to create a comprehensive anti-racism action plan. Despite this, CAPAR was allowed to lapse in 2010, and this critical obligation is currently unfulfilled.

"In response to questions about an anti-racism plan, the Federal government simply stated that diversity and inclusion were priorities. This isn't good enough" said Debbie Douglas of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. "We are looking forward to a robust anti-racism plan from the Government of Canada modeled on Ontario's strategy and implementation plan" she added.

"From the questions asked by the Committee it is clear that an evidence-based strategy is key to eradicating racism. That is why it is critical to collect disaggregated race-based data" said Avvy Go of the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. "As the Ontario government representative stated during the CERD meeting - no data, no problem, no solution" she added.

The groups felt that Canada's response on the critical issues of immigration detention and the harmful impact of the Safe Third Country Agreement on asylum seekers did not address the gravity of civil society concerns.

"We welcome the UN Committee questioning Canada on its detention policy, especially its refusal to impose a time limit on detention and the continuing detention of children. We are particularly heartened to hear the County Rapporteur commenting that detention is never in the best interests of children" said Shalini Konanur of South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. "We are deeply disappointed with Canada's lack of response on these important issues" she added.

"We were astounded that Canada denied that RCMP and other security forces engage in racial profiling. This is indicative of Canada's refusal to acknowledge anti-Black racism and the specific experiences of people of African descent in Canada" said Mobafa Baker of African Canadian Legal Clinic. "We hope that the Committee will remind Canada of its obligations to end anti-Black racism especially in this International Decade for People of African Descent" he added.

COP-COC looks forward to the Concluding Observations from the CERD Committee and will continue to hold Canada to account to promote racial equity and racial justice in Canada.

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