

Unifor Statement on “Racial Justice”



March 21 – International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

On March 21, 1960, sixty-nine people were killed and eighty were wounded by the racist state of South Africa while peacefully protesting Apartheid. The Security Council of the United Nations, in an unprecedented move, condemned the Sharpeville Massacre and the South African government for this action. March 21 was declared the “International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination” in 1966 by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In the 48 years since the establishment of this day, much has changed, but the struggle to end racial discrimination continues. Racism still exists. Despite the collapse of Apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the segregation of Aboriginal peoples, which Apartheid was based on, still stands.

Canada’s own history is rife with bigotry and exclusion, and while we have made progress, we still have a long way to go. Many immigrants coming to Canada in recent years have been migrant workers who have no path to citizenship, only adding to the situation of growing economic inequality. While many of the workers of colour are well-educated, they are over-represented in semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations and end up doing precarious work.

Unifor’s work on racial justice and anti-racism is shaped by a working class analysis of the root causes of racism which include colonialism, imperialism and the historical exploitation of people of colour throughout the world. Racism contradicts and undermines the union struggle for equality, inclusiveness and social justice. Intolerance, hatred and discrimination lead to the denial of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, endanger peace and our economic and social security.

Today is a day to remember that racism is still a part of our workplace, our union and our societies around the world. As trade unionists and Canadians, we must lead by example, at home and on the international stage, through our words and deeds. The efforts of Unifor Locals, along with hundreds of activists to make human rights and anti-racism issues a priority in our day-to-day work have resulted in many changes taking place in our union.

This day reminds us of the struggles and challenges that Aboriginal peoples and people of colour have endured and continue to face. At the same time, we should acknowledge and applaud the efforts of all the activists around the world who fight against racism, discrimination, bigotry.

Our union has and continually strives to achieve justice and equality for all. Unifor is committed to work with all of our members and locals to eliminate racism from our workplaces and communities. This statement is a reminder of the need to heighten awareness of the harmful effects of racism on a national scale and to clearly demonstrate the commitment and leadership of the union in fostering racial justice, respect, equality and diversity.