



March 21, 2009

From Many Peoples Strength

On March 21, 1960, the world was horrified to learn that 69 people were killed and more than 180 wounded when police turned their guns on a peaceful anti-apartheid demonstration outside Sharpsville, South Africa. In 1966, the United Nations response to the atrocity was to declare March 21st as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In Saskatchewan, it is the day when we join with nations around the world to promote a society which is free from all forms of racism.

Despite the passing of 49 years since that tragic day, and dedicated efforts to end racism, many Saskatchewan citizens are still denied respect and opportunities. Racism continues to deny people equality in important areas of their lives, such as employment, education, housing, and public services.

At the Commission, we have turned our thoughts to terminology and language which have a huge impact on people's day-to-day lives. The consequences of racist or discriminatory language cannot be ignored or seen as insignificant. As such, the Commission is joining others across our nation in turning the page on an era that once believed in the concept of "race." We have begun the task of dispelling the idea of "race" because there is no scientific validity to it. The selection of characteristics which in the past was used to define people in racial terms has been arbitrary. It was created by social, political, and economic forces which ranked people, often with the intent of devaluing them.

That is why we are so energized by the kinds of initiatives our employment equity partners are undertaking to explore the language of discrimination and how it affects our unconscious thoughts about others.

As equity supporters they are asking their employees to think about how we develop our beliefs and how those beliefs affect how we see others; to consider how we create generalizations and stereotypes; and to reflect upon the effects of racism and the inter-generational poverty that results from social and economic marginalization.

To their credit, they are also developing communications strategies to address these matters, such as offering awareness-raising workshops that touch on issues affecting Aboriginal and racialized employees.

This is important work. By reflecting on these issues, our employment equity partners are moving their organizations toward a workplace environment that welcomes people from all walks of life. This is a compelling ideal, one that is reflected in the motto of our province, "From Many Peoples Strength."

Although racism continues to challenge us, I am heartened by what I see as real dedication by the people of Saskatchewan to ending discrimination based on the outdated notion of "race." Our province has always been at the forefront of building communities that flourish. By embracing the positive energy created through inclusion, diversity, and harmony, we can lead the way in creating a world where these are the defining values of our time.

Judge David M. Arnot
Chief Commissioner