

## 2015 Statement on the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racism

True labour solidarity means addressing the economic exclusion of racialized and Aboriginal workers. This Saturday as part of our commemoration of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racism let us reflect on the words of Indigenous activist Lila Watson who said, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

The International Day for the Elimination of Racism is an important opportunity to reflect on an understanding of racism as something that goes beyond individual acts of intolerance. It’s an opportunity to focus on what the labour movement can do to continue to fight institutional and systemic oppressions faced by workers of colour and Aboriginal workers. These systemic forms of racism can be found in Federal legislation like Bill C-51. Stephen Harper’s so-called Anti-Terrorism legislation is not only an attack on everyone’s democratic rights but also criminalizes Aboriginal activism and promotes Islamophobia, all in the name of security and freedom.

Within the labour movement we have a duty to be vigilant in our fight against racism as a barrier to equality and solidarity. In Alberta alone, visible minorities and Aboriginal Canadians make up 24.6 per cent of our population. There is a tendency for these groups to be disproportionately concentrated in low-wage and non-union jobs with poor or no protections and benefits.

What this tells us is that racism has a very real impact on people’s economic reality. As the Canadian Labour Congress points out, in 2011 the unemployment rate for visible minority workers in Canada was 9.9 per cent compared to 7.3 per cent for non-racialized workers. Aboriginal workers in Canada earn an average of \$19,000 compared to \$33,000 for other Canadians. These disparities make clear that while the labour movement has made strides in strengthening human rights and addressing discrimination in the workplace, our work must continue.

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