

THE B'NAI BRITH COMMITMENT TO COMBATTING RACISM

INTRODUCTION

As a leading human rights organization, B'nai Brith Canada has long advocated for the rights of minorities globally and will always continue to do so. Together with our League for Human Rights, we have 145 years of experience in our unwavering commitment to the human rights struggle. We bring that dedication and experience to the challenge of confronting anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. We aim to contribute to practical solutions on the ground and do so in close partnership with likeminded institutions and individuals, in part through our Special Advisory Committee.

Hatred and bigotry should have no place in society. B'nai Brith Canada condemns racially motivated actions against any Canadian. There is no excuse for the instances of racism and police brutality that the Black and Indigenous communities have had to endure, whether through the actions of individual law enforcement officers or through the biased policy structures - conscious or unconscious - that have characterized Canadian society for generations.

We must confront the stigmatization of the Black and Indigenous communities, Asian-Canadians, and other distinctive communities, with more than words or expressions of support. We must lead in systematic reforms which seek to end racism and bias at the 'root and branch' level of our systems of governance, law enforcement and society generally, wherever they exist.

Racism and antisemitism are two sides of the same coin, illustrated by a point in former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's recent *'Agenda for Canadian Greatness': "Greater fairness and opportunities for our Black, Indigenous and people of colour together with a national commitment to the eradication of systemic racism and antisemitism in Canada"*.

One form of hate easily transforms into another and can be "*toxic to democracy*", a fundamental point in a recent [report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur](#) on Freedom of Religion or Belief. This is the reason why we have advocated for Canada to have an [anti-hate strategy](#) and a [national action plan](#) to combat antisemitism.

THE CONTEXT

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel - an iconic American Jewish civil rights activist who marched with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. - said: "*to march is to pray with our feet*". Throughout history, the right to protest peacefully has been a hallmark of free expression. In 2020, clergy of all faiths in the United States joined in and supported protests happening in cities nationwide, spurred by the death of George Floyd at the hands of police.

Protests in the United States have been followed by protests and demonstrations in Canada, regarded as a just response to anger, frustration, and pain arising from racist attitudes, many of them ingrained in nature, directed at members of the Black, Indigenous and, in some cases, Asian communities.

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation has noted that racism is also a reality in Canada; that racism (whether systemic, structural or ingrained, as it is often characterized) faced by the Black and Indigenous communities, in particular, is well-documented. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [addressed the protest marches](#) taking place across Canada and [acknowledged](#) and promised that his government will do more to address the situation. We welcome these messages and look forward to the changes soon. We echo the poignant points expressed by The Canadian Human Rights Commission's statement "[Anti-Black Racism in Canada: Time to Face the Truth](#)" that anti-Black racism is pervasive in Canada and we must work together to eradicate it.

At the same time, as heightened awareness of racism and injustice suffered by Black and Indigenous Canadians has shortened the '[national fuse](#)' on racial issues and understandably fostered an atmosphere of zero tolerance for racial bigotry, members of the Jewish community and other opponents of hatred have reasonably asked: Where is the commensurate outrage over antisemitism? Why does the pursuit of remedies to racial injustice fast forward past the hatred of Jews?

Racial justice and equity and the sacredness of Black and Indigenous lives deserve the full recognition owed by Canadian society. But, as long as threats to Jewish safety and dignity persist, we must acknowledge that those perils also be taken seriously. This means that long-time purveyors of antisemitism must not be mainstreamed, their offences deemed negligible, or otherwise rationalized or contextualized. Members of the Jewish community deserve no less.

B'NAI BRITH CANADA'S POSITION

B'nai B'rith Canada also condemns any senseless destruction of businesses, including those long-owned and operated by private individuals, often people of minority communities and immigrants who came to Canada to enjoy the freedoms of enterprise and commerce and provide outlets that people regard as essential to their lives.

We are outraged at any unjustified use of force, or killings, of any Canadian citizen by police officers.

While police abuse and violence can harm anyone in Canada, it disproportionately harms members of Black and Indigenous communities, who are more likely than others to be the subject of police violence.

We stand in solidarity with the Black and Indigenous communities who have for far too long been targeted by police and have suffered racism and unfair and uneven applications of the law.

We call upon our government and law enforcement at the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels to fully investigate and hold accountable all the involved officers and to prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law.

We call upon our government and law enforcement agencies at every level to institute sweeping reforms in law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

We pledge to join forces with the Black and Indigenous communities, and other Canadian communities, to see through these changes to law enforcement, end ingrained anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and work for a more just Canadian society.

B'nai B'rith calls on parliamentarians at the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal levels to pass legislation and introduce policies aimed at reviewing and reforming aspects of police work that involve standards and procedures for the apprehension of and use of force against a suspect.

B'nai Brith Canada believes that:

- **police tactics that restrict the flow of blood or oxygen to the brain** can violate a suspect's civil and basic human rights and that alternatives to these methods must be found;
- **the federal criminal intent requirement in killings by police should include recklessness, not simply willfulness**, in order to allow prosecutors to hold law enforcement accountable for the deprivation of civil rights and civil liberties; and
- **legislators and law enforcement officials should review, and revise where necessary**, procedures and laws that attempt to reduce the number of repeat or habitual offences.

B'nai B'rith Canada will use its extensive contacts in civil society generally, and in the intercommunal and interreligious fields more specifically, to strengthen relations between Jews, Black and Indigenous people, and other minorities, and increase mutual understanding about issues of shared concern.

B'nai Brith Canada will continue working with the Black and Indigenous Canadian communities, and other minority communities, to end ingrained racism and to lead transformative change in law enforcement and criminal justice at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.

We have advocated and will continue to advocate for:

- **diversity in police forces** to reflect the diversity of the population served.
- **better training** to deal with crisis situations involving minority community members.
- **alternative mechanisms to immediate police intervention**, where such mechanisms may be more suitable to the situation (e.g., wellness checks).

- **independent oversight and complaints mechanisms.**
- **direct communication** on an ongoing basis with minority communities.
- **the establishment of dedicated hate crimes units** and clear hate crimes strategies.
- **improved, rigorous and continuing self-defence, application of force, and conflict de-escalation training** for law enforcement officers.
- **better collection, analysis and publication of statistics about hate crimes** (in support of the recent joint statement by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police).
- **engaging in police work that has a focused benefit**, community by community, for the minority community served - for instance, a focus for Indigenous societies on disappeared women and girls.

To advance the cause of relations between the Jewish, Black and Indigenous Canadian communities, the challenge is for voices of compassion and mutual respect to rise above any sense of acrimony, misunderstanding or mistrust. Such voices should reflect a greater understanding of the complex and often painful histories of the three communities – and the experiences of other minority groups – and how the past has shaped each group's collective identity.

In recent times, through a series of documented events and incidents, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous racists and antisemites, plus those who advocate anti-Muslim hatred, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, have repeatedly demonstrated they wish to fracture the common bond of those confronting hate. Whether it be ingrained or systemic racism, racial inequality, or antisemitism, the result is the same: the attempt to sow suspicion, hatred and division. We are at our worst when we attack each other.

Groups of all background and faiths have struggled and suffered. From slavery, to the Holocaust, to residential schools, we have painful collective memories. All forms of racism have the same roots – ignorance, lack of education and scapegoating. B'nai Brith Canada is prepared to work with others to educate and eradicate racism now and for future generations.

AUGUST, 2020