

AN OVERVIEW

Canada's Action Plan Against Racism



A Canada for all



Government
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Canada 

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An Overview

A society free from racism. More than a matter of principle, this is Canada's vision. It brings together people of all backgrounds—ethnic, racial, and religious—to build a society where one's heritage is a source of pride and inspiration.

In the October 2004 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada reaffirmed this vision, vowing to: “take measures to strengthen Canada's ability to combat racism, hate speech and hate crimes, both here at home and around the world.”

Through programs, initiatives and legislation, Canada has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to combat racism and racially-based discrimination. *A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan Against Racism* is the next step in the Government of Canada's response.

In collaboration with partners across Canadian society, the ultimate goal is to wipe out racism altogether. To that end, this forward-looking plan seeks to enhance both existing and new initiatives across federal departments. A multi-year investment of \$56 million, included in the 2005 Federal Budget, further strengthens the government's ability to move full speed ahead.

A Canada for All is a call to action to all individuals and groups who have made this country their home. It invites all sectors of society—governments, organizations, individuals, ethno-racial and ethno-cultural communities—to embrace action against racism as a shared task with shared responsibilities and shared benefits.

Canada's legal framework

Over the past forty years, the Government of Canada has established a solid legal framework that integrates a forceful collection of laws and policies. On the issue of equality, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is clear: Section 15 (1) states that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination. Moreover, Section 35 recognizes and affirms the historical and treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples. Other legislation includes: the *Canadian Human Rights Act*; the *Canadian Bill of Rights*; the *Employment Equity Act*; the *Official Languages Act*; the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*; the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*; and the *Citizenship Act*.

Activities and programs at home have bolstered a longstanding effort beyond our borders to fight racism, discrimination and racial intolerance around the world. Canada is party to several international human rights instruments and fora, including the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. Ratified by Canada in 1970, it calls on governments “to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without

distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms." In 2002, Canadian representatives appeared before the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to report on the convention's implementation in Canada.

In his 2003 visit to Canada, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Discrimination praised Canadians for embracing diversity and for having strong mechanisms to protect citizens from discrimination. He encouraged Canada to do more, however, through an action plan to combat racism.

Canada's changing society

Today, nearly half of Canada's citizens (47%) are of an ethnic origin other than British, French or native-born Canadian.

More than 94 percent of visible minorities live within Canada's metropolitan areas.

In Vancouver and Toronto, more than a third of the population is a visible minority. It is projected that by 2016, this figure will increase to more than half.

Canada's 2001 Census indicates that 20 percent of immigrants living in Canada's metropolitan areas are considered low-income families. This compares unfavourably to the 12 percent of non-immigrants living within the same geographic boundaries.

In 2001, Statistics Canada reported that one-in-five school children in Toronto and Vancouver was a new immigrant.

The same report noted that for almost half of all children in Toronto, and 61 percent in Vancouver, the language spoken most often at home was neither English nor French.

Our ongoing challenge

In spite of these domestic and international efforts, public opinion research suggests that racism remains a serious problem. This troubling reality was confirmed in a 2003 Ipsos-Reid survey commissioned by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada and the Globe and Mail. In it, 74 percent of respondents expressed the view that there is still considerable racism in Canada. Other research, including the Ethnic Diversity Survey and Statistics Canada census data, identifies a variety of concerns:

- 36 percent of visible minorities feel they have experienced discrimination and unfair treatment because of ethno-cultural characteristics;
- nearly 50 percent of Blacks reported discrimination or unfair treatment. By contrast, 33 percent of South Asian and Chinese respondents reported discrimination or unfair treatment;
- when broken down by gender, there is a slight increase in reports of discrimination by Black men (53% compared to 47% for women). There is a similar increase reported by South Asian men (38% compared to 27% for women);

- according to a 2003 Ekos survey, 46 percent of Aboriginal people living off-reserve reported being a victim of racism or discrimination at least once over the previous two years;
- research by Ipsos-Reid (2002) suggested that more than six-out-of-ten Canadians (61%) think that racism separates Aboriginal peoples from the rest of society; and
- roughly the same proportion (59%) felt that Aboriginal peoples are discriminated against by other Canadians.

Real equality

Equality of outcome—not simply equality of opportunity—is a core principle of Canada's action plan. In seeking to eliminate racism and to help close the gap in socio-economic outcomes for all Canadians, the action plan is guided by three objectives:

- To strengthen social cohesion;
- To further implement Canada's human rights framework; and
- To demonstrate federal government leadership in the international fight against racism and hate-motivated crime.

Taking action, together

It takes more than legal measures to defeat racism and discrimination. That is why *Canada's Action Plan Against Racism* emphasizes the importance of building partnerships between governments and civil society. The federal commitment is clear: departments and agencies are working together to implement new and existing policies, programs and activities to address priority issues. Further, the action plan invites all Canadians to work together in six priority areas:

- 1) Assist victims and groups vulnerable to racism and related forms of discrimination;
- 2) Develop forward-looking approaches to promote diversity and combat racism;
- 3) Strengthen the role of civil society;
- 4) Strengthen regional and international cooperation;
- 5) Educate children and youth on diversity and anti-racism; and
- 6) Counter hate and bias.

With the priorities clearly defined, Canada has committed to deliver on these initiatives:

Working with civil society

Canada will:

- Develop partnerships between federal departments and ethno-cultural community groups to ensure that policies and programs reflect the needs of an increasingly multicultural population;
- Continue to support ethno-racial and ethno-cultural communities with project funding and by providing knowledge and expertise to combat racism;
- Build on existing partnerships to improve the sense of identity and belonging in Aboriginal communities, while preserving and promoting languages and culture; and
- Expand settlement services to include more youth, involve business and francophone minority communities, and reduce barriers in schools.

Working with employers and associations

Canada will:

- Collaborate with employers, unions and other stakeholders to identify and address systemic barriers in the workplace;
- Support members of ethno-cultural communities to facilitate the process of foreign credentials recognition; and
- Work with various sectors of society to facilitate fair representation of racial and ethnic minorities. Through agencies like the National Film Board of Canada, Telefilm Canada, and the Canada Council for the Arts, the federal government will encourage the inclusion of professionals from ethno-racial, ethno-cultural and Aboriginal communities.

Working with police

Canada will:

- Provide racially and culturally sensitive police services and tackle priority issues such as hate-motivated crime;
- Enable a more consistent approach by law enforcement officers across Canada to better serve Aboriginal, ethno-racial and ethno-cultural communities;
- Enable policing authorities to collect consistent data on hate-motivated crimes;
- Work with Internet service providers and stakeholders to counter the distribution of hate propaganda; and
- Conduct research on hate-motivated crimes to identify victims' needs along with interventions to reduce the number of repeat offenders.

Reporting back to Canadians

Tracking and reporting on progress are key to the success of *Canada's Action Plan Against Racism*. To this end, the Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage will establish an accountability framework. In addition, a partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada will identify indicators for measuring levels of racism.

The Government of Canada will continue to partner with the provinces and territories to facilitate information sharing and address racism and multiculturalism issues where there is joint responsibility. The Minister of State (Multiculturalism) will consult annually with stakeholders to assess progress in breaking down barriers to opportunity and participation, and to renew efforts to eliminate racism entirely.

The federal government will update Canadians through the Annual Report on the Operation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. It will also report to the United Nations as part of Canada's commitments in support of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

The report to Canadians—like the action plan itself—will be open-ended and evolutionary. This will ensure ongoing evaluation and create regular opportunities to identify new opportunities for progress in the fight against racism. Building racial equality and social equity is not an undertaking with well-defined start and finish points. Rather, it is an ongoing responsibility and part of Canada's evolution.

Conclusion

Workable approaches, measurable results, international leadership and continuous dialogue—all are key components for the success of this action plan. Beyond roles and responsibilities, it highlights best practices that can be shared with and within both domestic and international communities. Moreover, it demonstrates how Canada and all Canadians benefit from delivering on a commitment to support anti-racism and multiculturalism issues.

This is a shared plan of action. The Government of Canada has committed to sustaining its efforts—and has proposed new initiatives—to fight racism and racially-based discrimination. But it also calls on every Canadian to do their part by getting involved in this essential undertaking.

By embracing this action plan, Canadians move closer to realizing a shared vision for a truly inclusive society—a Canada for all. It is a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, where there is a helping hand when needed, and where no one is left behind.