

November 10, 2021

Dear Ms. Charette, Interim Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet,

In January 2021, the Clerk issued a [Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion](#), and acknowledged the efforts of grassroots networks and communities in increasing collective awareness of systemic discrimination and building progressive paths forward based on stronger **'nothing about us without us'** interventions.

In June 2021 you, as Interim Clerk, requested Senior Officials across Departments in the Federal Public Service provide reports on actions they have taken to support Anti-Racism efforts within their departments and agencies. As a response to this request, we, the [Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network \(ARAN\)](#), a grassroots community of public servants concerned with dismantling systemic racism have observed and participated in Anti-Racism work across the Government of Canada (GC) and offer you our insights.

As you consider the official work done and currently underway within the GC to promote anti-racism mindsets and practices, we ask that you also consider our insights and recommendations to address the realities concerning systemic racism and share them with all Departmental Heads.

Recommended Action

We share the following recommendations based on the collective and multitudinous ranges of experience among Black peoples, Indigenous peoples, and other racialized peoples who serve as public servants and who continue to face undue, unfair, differential, and diverse impacts of systemic racism across the GC:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing reports and recommendations provided in previous years, sharing them with all department heads and then identifying and implementing what was committed in them, where still relevant, before initiating new programs, activities, or recruitment efforts.
- Create an open and transparent space or fora to provide ongoing evidence-based updates on the status of the implementation of those recommendations including any adaptations made, and whether and how they contribute to the ultimate impact, the dismantling of systemic racism and discrimination within the GC.
- Create an independent advisory and review board to provide insights and expertise on Anti-Racism actions and initiatives taking place across the GC and highlight best practices that can be used for federal departments and agencies and share with subnational and international governments.
- Create a representative working-level committee to support Anti-Racism actions and initiatives and include at least two employees from each department and agency to create a space for bottom-up input.
- Ensure that the views of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities are not only invited to inform the discussions on all boards, committees, working groups, etc. but are valued and, most importantly, reflected in the outcomes of decision making when it comes to the development of processes, policies, services and procedures that might affect these communities.

Here's what we know:

- We know that Anti-Racism work has been in place long before the murder of George Floyd and that several reports and recommendations were provided to the GC to address racism and related issues within our workplaces and communities, yet no further information has been provided on the status of the implementation of these recommendations or how they are being measured.
- We know that the brunt of Anti-Racism work is being done at the grassroots level by networks whose members primarily fall into marginalized groups. The groups that carry the weight of this work often act from the side of their desk. Even when invited to do so by senior officials, these people are often met by various types of individual and/or organizational bias-laden resistance. It is unclear how much of their efforts (often leading to burnout) are taken up by Management.
- We know that disaggregated data is unavailable and/or withheld. The issue of disaggregated data is complex and multi-faceted, but deeply connected to the reality of systemically racist organizations. The collection, analysis, and interpretation around quantitative and qualitative intersectional data is key to moving forward in dismantling systemic racism. However, there are many institutional roadblocks and gatekeepers preventing progress.
- We know that there continues to be performative attitudes and behaviours related to what people understand to be anti-racist or equity-informed practices, and that people who work from these uninformed stances continue to uphold rather than disrupt oppressive systems by trying to resolve issues at the surface level rather than acknowledging and addressing the root causes of systemic racism.
- We know that systemic advantages happen in every facet of GC organizations, and are maintained by both the lack of awareness and self-reflection on the parts of individuals to these advantages, even after Unconscious Bias training, and/or the learned helplessness in the face of having to confront and dismantle these advantages. These barriers persist for those who view implementation of EDI frameworks as a zero-sum game, instead of recognizing the benefits for people who live in Canada. Institutional change requires acknowledging the **myth of meritocracy** that exists in the recruitment, retention, and promotion of GC employees. Transformative change can only occur when institutions are clear about *how* this myth is active on an on-going basis within organizational cultures and *who* benefits within GC organizations and through the GC's policies, programs, and services, and in Canadian society at large.

- We also know that Black, Indigenous, and other racialized employees are working in a system that is designed to hold them back from career progression (e.g., official language policy barriers) and therefore they feel the need to perform at a higher level and overcompensate to be seen as equivalent, while simultaneously dealing with the realities of the Covid-19 pandemic (where systemic racism in the healthcare system is also problematic).
- We know that many employees (both racialized public servants and allies) do not speak up or call-out forms of systemic racism, including micro-aggressions and direct racism, because the culture of the system and the relevant processes are set up to work against these individuals, prompting deep-seated fear of repercussions, barriers to career advancement and mental health challenges.
- We know that employees are discouraged by the tenor of current diversity and inclusion efforts given that many of the folks leading those efforts are Senior Executives and Human Resources staff, rather than experts with demonstrated capacity in dismantling systemically oppressive structures.
- We know that a representative workforce across all levels is an important start to addressing systemic racism within the GC workplace context, and in the GC's capacity to deliver inclusive, bias-free policies, programs, and services to Canada's extraordinarily diverse population.

Background

In June 2020, ARAN was established by the coming together of public servants who were disappointed by institutional silence in the wake of the senseless murder of George Floyd and the global anti-Black racism mass protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement. We saw this again through acts of anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia that was shared in the news for months in addition to the ongoing uncovering of unmarked graves of Indigenous children. Members opened dialogue with each other and hoped to also connect with senior leaders to discuss the systemic barriers that Indigenous, Black, and other racialized public servants continue to experience in the workplace. ARAN, a network of networks and individuals spanning multiple public service jurisdictions and communities in Canada, aspires to meaningful anti-racist change and support for public servants who have experienced the impacts of systemic racism in the public service.

ARAN connects members who already work in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism spaces in their respective departments and agencies with many public servants working on these efforts at the side of their desk. There is power in working together as a community outside of departments. Rather than serving performance-related objectives, ARAN focuses on supporting people who work for systemic change, starting with individuals and bringing them into community around anti-racist values. We recognize that the necessity of inner work and the solidarity that contributes to complex systems change. This work is not only about completing a task, delivering targets, or pushing a file forward, it is about acknowledging the dignity, humanity and excellence of people who have often experienced harm and have been treated as disposable and expendable within systemically racist institutional environments.

Conclusion

We recognize that senior leaders are sincere in moving equity forward within GC organizations to better serve people who live in Canada. As a collection of public servants knowledgeable and proactive about anti-racism and racial equity (from an intersectional standpoint), ARAN is concerned about the lack of coordinated, coherent, and sufficiently resourced pursuit of impactful initiatives that are being designed to quickly and profoundly reverse on-going harms experienced by those who experience systemic racism in the workplace. ARAN aggregates voices and courage as it offers its members' views of key tensions (grouped into thematic challenge inquiries) to grapple with in relation to advancing meaningful and impactful anti-racism efforts. Annex A provides an outline of several challenges rooted in systemic racism experienced by Black, Indigenous and other racialized federal public servants. We urge you to have a read.

We are committed to continuing our work as individuals and as a collective so that we may see a more equitable GC -- a GC for the benefit of all -- in future.

Members of ARAN would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the contents of this letter and ARAN; however, we, as members of the Federal Public Service, recognize the demands on your time. Most importantly for us, we hope that the ideas expressed in this letter are shared with senior leadership so that they can consider these perspectives as they evaluate the activities undertaken within the GC to determine if those activities are meaningful for those who are most impacted by systemic racism.

This letter is shared with the best intentions of continuing to support the important work currently underway across the GC and with the goal of creating a better public service for all who work within it and who serve people who live in Canada. This transformation and realization of core values requires everyone that is part of this system to have a common and holistic understanding; recognize and admit where and why individuals and organizations have and continue to fall short; and work as a collective.

Sincerely,

The Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network in collaboration with The Pacific Aboriginal Network (PAN)



Challenges in the Federal Public Service that Contribute to Systemic Racism

Our network has outlined several challenges seen and experienced by public servants with respect to systemic racism in the GC and grouped them into thematic questions. We recognize that racism is experienced differently by Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups (Arab, West Indian/Caribbean, Latin American, East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, and Pacific Islander) and is compounded by intersecting factors including colonization, language and gender, and stereotypes such as the *myth of the model minority*.

How might the GC develop inclusive policy processes that center the experiences and expertise of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized public servants in a way that prioritizes the marginalized groups that are stigmatized and displaced the most (e.g., Black and Indigenous)?

- Design a system that is rooted in equity or improve our ability to include equity in enterprise-based decision making. Move away from performative policies/gestures towards real and measurable change.
- De-center non-racialized voices on discussions regarding anti-racism policies.
- Regularly and ethically collect disaggregated data (quantitative and qualitative) that will inform progress related to anti-racism efforts/measures/policies within the Government of Canada.
- Evaluate ways that measure impact against the broader aim of dismantling systemic racism and other forms of discrimination.

How might the GC prioritize anti-racism and ally training for management levels?

- Ensure management unlearn practices and mindsets that result in discrimination, harassment, and marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized employees.
- Communicate the importance of respecting the experience of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized persons.
- Ensure that those with privilege take on the burden of emotional labour and administrative tasks that often fall on marginalized groups to take on while those with the most privilege are leading the diversity efforts.
- Support the learning and mental health needs of employees experiencing harm.

How might the GC respect, recognize and honour the anti-racism work currently being done (often unpaid and on the margins) by Black, Indigenous and other racialized employees?

- Raise the profile and acknowledge the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized employees in meaningful ways that result in dismantling of formal and informal systemic barriers to advancement, retention and belonging.
- Meaningfully and equitably sponsor historically marginalized employees.
- Ensure quality mandated education is delivered in the appropriate ways to the appropriate people.

How might the GC address systemic barriers that hamper Black, Indigenous, and other racialized employees' career trajectories?

- Review and address systemic barriers in the promotions process which includes but is not limited to balancing official language requirements with equitable opportunities.
- Recognize and address challenges faced by Black, Indigenous and other racialized employees and ensure appropriate resources are readily available and that assessment processes are revised to include the diversity among these groups.
- Require Deputies to do a GBA+ Audit of language/development training and appointments to senior and EX positions with Official Language profiles to validate/understand how race intersects with language and, to determine if Francophone Black, Indigenous and racialized employees experience the same low levels of representation as their Anglophone Black, Indigenous and racialized colleagues.
- Acknowledge that requiring Indigenous people to learn another language of their colonizers exacerbates the cycle of trauma stemming from colonization.
- Identify and address the unique career development challenges faced by Black Indigenous and racialized employees particularly in the regions and particularly those in front line operational settings. Recognize that historically these colleagues have had limited opportunities of advancements including networking and mentorship opportunities and resources in comparison to their NCR colleagues in other disciplines
- Support GC (new) racialized employees in finding communities/mentors.
- Remove the bias embedded in non-advertised promotions and make them fair and transparent.
- Publish race-based data on the non-advertised appointments that have taken place over the last 5 years. The April 1, 2016 [New Direction in Staffing -- Message from the Public Service Commission to all Public Servants](#) caused a lot of harm to racialized and Indigenous public servant communities because it allowed unbridled favouritism and abuse of power benefitting white employees and the reinforcement of white supremacy in the public service.