

MARCH
21
2022

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION



PHASED-OUT PASS SYSTEMS, BUT RACIST LEGACIES ENDURED

It is important to note that “pass systems” existed long before the Sharpeville massacre. Here in Canada, a pass system was developed by the federal government in the 1800s. Under the pass system, Indigenous people had to present a travel document authorized by an ‘Indian agent’ to leave and return to their reserves. The pass system was never enacted into law but was nonetheless used as a practice for controlling movement and preventing large gatherings of Indigenous people, which was seen by many white settlers as a threat to their settlements. The ‘pass system’ was phased out in the 1930s and early 1940s. However, its legacy endures.

PROCLAIMED IN 1966 BY THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD) was proclaimed in 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly in response to what is known as the Sharpeville massacre or the Sharpeville tragedy. Six years earlier, on March 21, 1960, Black people in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, gathered to peacefully protest the enactment of “Pass Laws.” These laws were a system of internal passports designed to segregate the population. “Pass Laws” were used to control Black South Africans and migrant labour by preventing freedom of movement and supporting police enforcement of apartheid. The protesters were fired upon, killing 69, shooting many in their backs, and wounding hundreds. The shooting of peaceful protesters caught the world’s attention. With its 1966 proclamation, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to increase efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

COMMIT TO EQUALITY: GO BEYOND EQUITY

While the above recounts history, racial discrimination still informs much of how we function. Ingrained practices of racism often supersede established policies and procedures meant to end racial discrimination. In 2020, the world was angst by the death of George Floyd. In 2012, with the start of the Idle No More movement, Indigenous voices were given attention. Yet, we continue to struggle with racism and its impact. This year, as we commemorate IDERD, let us commit to going beyond policies and procedures to actions that demonstrate that we accept each other as equals, which means going beyond equity.



YES, IT MATTERS!
ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM
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