



Event	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – “Combating Racism is Everyone’s Business”
Location	Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion
Date / Time	Wednesday, March 21, 2012 Event begins: 11:30 am Speaking time:
-Contact	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
-Speech length/type	Keynote - 20 minutes Stage, with podium
Topic	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Event format	Luncheon for 150+ NGO’s and community leaders
Audience	120-150 teachers, students, parents

Other speakers:

Bob Bratina, Mayor

Notes:

Staff person will meet you at the entrance

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

Introduction

- Happy to be here today to on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- We've been marking this day since 1966.
- Some of us here today have experienced racism first hand.
- As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says, in his March 21 message this year, racism “thrives on ignorance, prejudice and stereotypes”.
- One of the key tasks of the Ontario Human Rights Commission is to educate and to raise awareness – to try to end the ignorance and tear down the stereotypes.
- But it not just our job – it is yours as well.
- I'm happy to say Canada was one of the first countries to sign on to participate in this day recognizing racism—and to make the commitment to end it.
- And Ontario was the first province in Canada to formally recognize the moral, social and economic consequences of discrimination by enacting the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in 1962—50 years ago.
- The first *Code* reflected the pressing human rights issues in Canada at the time. It said that people must not be discriminated against because of race, creed, colour, nationality, ancestry or place of origin.

- And it prohibited discrimination in signs and notices, public accommodation, services and facilities, employment and trade union membership.
- The *Code* now protects people under 15 grounds, including race, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability.
- in 5 social areas:
 - employment, accommodation, goods, services and facilities, and membership in vocational associations and trade unions.
- The head of the first Human Rights Commission was a Black man who had experienced devastating racism in the U.S. before he came to Canada with his wife in 1953.
- They experienced more of the same here.
- Daniel Hill was a Black man married to a White woman. They couldn't find a place to live in Toronto until a white friend posed as Donna's husband.
- This was one of the many experiences that led Daniel and Donna Hill to become strong advocates for human rights in Ontario.
- We're here today because we've all made a commitment to seeing an end to racial discrimination in all its forms.
- It may not be as "in your face" as it was back in 1962, but it lingers in schoolyards and worksites, in your neighbourhood and in mine, causing

tension and conflict in communities and preventing people from being everything they could be.

- We know that to eradicate racial discrimination we first need to acknowledge that it exists and that it's not the result of a few “bad apples.”
- Racism and discrimination are sadly “bred in the bone” of many of our institutions and organizations.
- The good news is – there are ways to fix that, and I will talk about a few of them today.

Despite the fact that Ontario is one of the most diverse regions in the world, we have a long way to go in terms of creating inclusive communities.

- An Ipsos-Reid survey done a few years back showed that 1 in 6 adult Canadians have personally been victims of racism in their lifetime.
- 1 in 10 Canadians said they didn't want people from another race as neighbours.
- The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation did what they call a “paired testing” study on discrimination in housing not long ago, where white person and a Black person with identical credentials apply to rent the same apartment. I probably don't have to tell you how that turned out....

- It showed that the same discrimination faced by Daniel and Donna Hill in 1953 still exists today.
- In the fall of 2007, southern and central Ontario saw a serious of race-related attacks on Asian Canadians anglers...attacks that affected the whole Asian Canadian community...
- At the OHRC we still see this type of racial stereotyping and other discreet, “systemic” racism in policing, education and other organizations and institutions.
- In some cases we’re seeing racism as an “intersectional” concern where discrimination is compounded by a person identifying with multiple *Code* grounds. For example a Black, lesbian woman might experience racism in a much different way than a Black, straight man.
- Here in the Hamilton area there have been recent stories of rights abuses relating to migrant workers and racism in schools.
- These aren’t just isolated incidents. Things like this are happening every day, to many people around the world and right here in Ontario.
- The impact this kind of discrimination has on individuals is huge.
- When we were developing our Policy on Racial Discrimination and looking into racial profiling, we heard that the impact of racism is dramatic, compelling and long lasting.
- It is unacceptable that people continue to experience this.

We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go...

- Racism no longer exists as an overt sign hanging in a shop window refusing services. That's good.
- But our challenge now is to address the more subtle forms of discrimination that result from deeply rooted attitudes, values and stereotypes that often exist in individual behaviour and in organizational policies and practices.
- Many times it is unintentional.
- This does not excuse the fact that this type of “systemic” racism disadvantages many people—it tears at people, and destroys the fabric of our communities.
- And it is against the law.
- The work we do at the Ontario Human Rights Commission is about preventing discrimination before it takes root and taking proactive steps to address and reverse the impact and legacy of historical disadvantage.

Our vision is an Ontario in which everyone is valued, treated with dignity and respect, and where human rights are nurtured by us all.

- It's no accident that we use the word nurture. We had a lot of conversation about how to describe what it is that we want to see and what we all need to do.

- We nurture our children so that they can contribute to their communities and reach their full potential—we all need to do the same when it comes to other vulnerable groups in our society.
- Our role in Ontario's human rights system is to make sure that each person understands their rights and responsibilities under the *Code* and can advocate for themselves and their friends, families, neighbours and communities.
- When we see inequity or discrimination happening in communities and institutions we try to work with them to build a culture of understanding and human rights—sometimes we use our legislated, legal powers.
- The work we did with communities on the Asian Canadian anglers issue is a good example of that.
- We've also done a lot of work with educators to ensure that schools are safe, equitable, inclusive places.
- We work with police services and other organizations across the province to make sure that the principles of human rights are being applied to all their policies and procedures.
- We continue to support the Coalition of Municipalities for Against Racism and Discrimination to develop anti-racism and discrimination policies and make organizational change at the deepest levels.
- The 36 municipalities that have signed on across Canada, and the 11 from Ontario have made a commitment to:
 - Acknowledging that racism exists

- Accepting shared responsibility
 - Making a commitment to take action against racism by sharing experiences and expertise, and developing an action plan for the municipality
 - Setting out priorities, actions and timelines, allocating resources according to unique circumstances within their means and jurisdiction.
- The groundbreaking work we've done with the Toronto Police Charter Project—a 3-year project to embed a culture of human rights in all facets of their operations—resulted from the City of Toronto's commitment to the coalition.

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* talks about...

- The need to recognize the dignity and worth of each person, and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination.
- Essentially what this means is that none of us should experience discrimination where we work, live, play or go to school.
- What it also means is we not only have a moral obligation to protect the rights of our co-workers and clients—but that we also have a legal responsibility to do so.
- Employers and service providers are responsible for ensuring that everyone human rights are protected and that there is equal access.

- It is not okay for an employer or service provider to say that they didn't know discrimination is happening.
- Proactive steps must be taken to create equitable, inclusive environments.
- A failure to do so not only can result in legal action—but also narrows your client base and human resources pool.
- Simply put, it doesn't make practical business or economic sense to discriminate.

I invite you to personally take on the challenge...

- Equity needs to be an integral part of everything we do.
- It's not just the law—it's the best way to make sure we have strong communities where everyone is contributing and realizing their full potential.
- Without strong anti-racist, anti-oppression policies and a human rights perspective, how will we harness the talent we've got right here, from all over the world?
- You are here because you have made a commitment to eliminating racial discrimination—and to human rights, equity and inclusion generally.
- I invite you to consistently interrupt racist, sexist and homophobic behaviour—and tell your co-workers and friends to do the same.

- I encourage you to develop a solid human rights approach for your organization—one that sets the framework for the vision of equity and inclusion that you are trying to achieve.
- You can do this by...
 - Doing a human rights audit of your policies, process and procedures
 - Assessing the organizational culture – is it truly open and inclusive?
 - Making sure your leadership is committed to change - and ready to “walk the walk”
 - Involve everyone in the change process
 - Clearly communicate your goals and objectives
 - Monitor and evaluate the change process
- I encourage you to push for and support change at the institutions within your communities.

We know it’s not easy, but we have a lot of resources on the internet to help you...

- Google us, and you will find plenty of plain-language information on our website.

- There you'll find Count Me In! A guide offering practical tips on how organizations can collect data to meet strategic goals relating to equity.
- And guidelines for making organizational change.
- You'll also find our e-learning module Human Rights 101—an overview of the *Code*.
- And our policy on Racial Discrimination, among others.
- We'd also be delighted if you would follow us on Twitter: "onhumanrights", and friend us on Facebook: "the.ohrc"
- And take part in our Living Rights project—a web-based initiative that's putting a face to human rights in our province by asking you to give us your story.
- As Barack Obama said, "We cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together."
- Let us all mark this day by resolving to work together to meet the challenges created by racism.
- Thank you very much.