

DIALOGUE ON RACISM – SHARING SALT



A GRASSROOTS
GATHERING

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Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

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Sources: *Amnesty International Factsheet: Get Active Against Racism* produced by the Youth and Student Office, Amnesty International, Dublin, Ireland and available at <http://www.amnesty.ie/amnesty/upload/images/attachdocuments/Get%20Active%20Against%20Racism.pdf>.

Statistics Canada *2006 Community Profiles* available at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>.

For more information about the *Dialogue on Racism*, please contact Amnesty International Lethbridge at admin@amnestylethbridge.com.

Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of the ideas of many people who attended a potluck dinner on a cold and blustery March day in Lethbridge, Alberta, to share food, stories, and ideas for constructive action about racism.

Amnesty International Lethbridge, the Lethbridge Mennonite Church, and the Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge co-organized the *Dialogue on Racism* potluck dinner on March 5, 2009. We invited all local churches, civic society groups, First Nations organizations, Lethbridge City Council, the Kainai and Piikani chiefs, the Blood Tribe and Lethbridge City police, the Chamber of Commerce president, the MLAs and MP, and extended an open invitation via the Lethbridge Herald to members of the public.

We gave each attendee a number when they arrived, so that people would be sitting with people they did not already know. We wanted everyone to meet new people and break out of their familiar circles. Each table had a facilitator who helped their fellow dinner guests answer the set of three questions which were posed. We had simple ground rules: everyone's ideas were equally important, everyone must show respect, and everyone was worthy. We began to eat at 6:00 pm, and at 7:30 pm the facilitator from each table presented the results of their discussions to the whole room. Notes were taken on flip chart paper, and posted around the room as we progressed. By 8:00 pm, we had enough ideas for this booklet!

The Dialogue on Racism addressed three questions:

- What are the key areas of concern about racial discrimination?

- What practical and positive ideas do you have for actions we can do as a community?
- What should we do next?

This booklet contains the ideas that the dinner guests shared. We hope that you will actually try out some of the ideas, and that we will see positive change in our community.

We are deeply grateful to the dinner guests, for the time and care that they took, to show their compassion and love for their fellow citizens. We apologize to anyone whose name we have inadvertently omitted.

The Dinner Guests:

Anastasia Sereda
Andrew Burrows Johnson
Alicia Visser
Amy Tiberghien
Andre Duguay
Aurora Bellow
Charlene Bruised Head-Mountain Horse
Claire Benson
Deb Lebeau
Douglas Mitchell
Ed Granger
Edith Beveridge
Ernie Sawatsky
Gabriel Cassie
Gwen McNabb
Heather Caldwell
Heather Chomos
Ira Provost
Jacinda Weiss
Jacqueline Preyde
Jason Anderson
Jennifer Schmidt
Juanita Iron Shirt
Judith Grossman
Julie Kissick
Katelynn Bates
Katelynn Goodwin

Kayress Dela Cruz
Ken Tratch
Kristine Cassie
Lynn Russell
Mary McEachern
Matthew Miller
Mike Frank
Nadine Eagle Child
Rick Tailfeathers
Robin Little Bear
Rod McLeod
Roxie Vaile
Rudy Black Plume
Mary Kosta
Ruth Preston Schilk
Ruth Provost
Sarah Amies
Sarah Sweet Grass
Sharon Yanicki
Shelley Crop Eared Wolf
Sherrie Kwan
Margaret Simmons
Sonny Dhoot
Sophie Osaya
Thomas Fox
Treena Tallow
Trish Silk
Troy Nickle
Tyler Gschaid
Woytek Karwowski
Zaw Kyaw
Dan Walton
Diane Randell
Kathy Tratch
Kesang Drawu
Hanray Van Den Ham



What Is Racism?

Racism is the belief that members of one group are inherently superior to, and have a right to dominate those of other groups. This view can result in discrimination or abusive behavior towards members of another group.

It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate.

-James Baldwin

People who experience racism feel that they have nowhere to turn to, and feel defeated and abused.

-A Dinner Guest



Racism can include name-calling, rudeness, avoidance, stereotyping, racial profiling by police, discrimination by employers, jokes, insulting graffiti, assuming people of a certain culture are the same, treating people differently in hospitals, schools and government offices, bullying and so forth. In extreme cases, racism can lead to violence and even death.

Racism denies people access to basic needs such as shelter, food, education, and employment. It is systematic discrimination based on 'race', color, descent, ethnicity, caste, or national origin. It is a learned behaviour. Children learn racism from adults, at home, in the community, and in school.

A specific type of racism is xenophobia. This is fear of people of foreign origin. People may exhibit racist attitudes toward newcomers to Alberta, because of ignorance or fear. Considering the influx of temporary foreign workers in many industries, including the food processing industry in Lethbridge, this type of racism is serious.

What the Dinner Guests Said

Racism is making a judgment about someone based on something that they cannot change. It is differential or negative treatment based on 'race' or ethnic background. The types of racism are systemic: social, financial, educational, business, housing, employment, and failure to give credit for pre-existing skills.

Racism is passed down through generations.

Racism results from a lack of understanding, lack of cultural awareness, hatred, assumptions, profiling, seeing people as different, categorizing, labeling, class hierarchy, and judging people by their appearance as opposed to who they are as people. Racism has social and economic roots. Parents, religion, and the media can all transmit racism.

Racism is unfair treatment. It can involve bullying. Racism can lead to bodily harm, emotional abuse, trauma, and even death. It causes hurt and pain. Racism is an 'us versus them' mentality. Racism exists everywhere and affects us all.

The key impacts of racism are in the areas of housing, health, and employment. However, it is all connected – access to employment affects access to housing, for example.

Corporate attitudes lead to racial discrimination. Institutions that do not embrace diversity play down racism. They do not have tools to educate about racism.

When gender and race are combined, discrimination is compounded.

Racial profiling alienates, and creates a class hierarchy.

Racism creates loss in our community – loss of friendship, loss of knowledge, and financial loss.



Does Racism Exist In Our Community?

Yes. Our community is home to people of different nationalities and ethnic groups. Unfortunately, it is also home to people who behave in a racist way, on purpose, or due to ignorance. People who are victims of racism speak of developing a shell to protect them, and of choosing not to talk about their experiences because it means re-living them and being victimized again.

Often, people do not speak out when they witness racist acts, because of fear, or because they are not certain whether what they are seeing or hearing is actually racism, or because they do not know how to express their opposition. According to Howard Zinn, "The tiniest acts of protest in which we engage may become the invisible roots of social change..." It is important to speak out. Campaigns against racism have resulted in the release of prisoners wrongfully convicted because of racism. They have forced governments to change discriminatory laws. They have supported the rights of asylum seekers and migrant workers. Not speaking out has led to atrocious acts of racism, including genocide, as in Rwanda where up to 1 million Tutsi people were slaughtered by Hutus during the civil war.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Racism is quite common in our community. We are in denial about it.

-A Dinner Guest



Racism denies people their full human rights. The right not to suffer from racial discrimination is one of the most basic principles of international law. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

What the Dinner Guests Said

There is blatant racism in our community. There is now more diversity in our communities. There is an increase in the number of white supremacists.

There is institutional racism within the police force. Police single out aboriginal men and put them in jail. Police arrest aboriginal youth, but there are no charges laid

repeatedly. How does one report misdeeds of the police? The attitude is that perceived racism is all in the victim's head.

There are no consequences for racially motivated crimes, yet discrimination is a crime. To stop racial discrimination, we need a system in place to address complaints. There is no easy avenue to make complaints about racism.

How do you prove that you are a victim of racial discrimination, as opposed to discrimination based on sex or age? Subtle forms of racial discrimination are more difficult to address. Sometimes people do not even recognize that they are being discriminatory.

We have learned to deal with racism by not responding to it. If we give the source any hint that what they say or do affects us, hurts us, then we have satisfied their mission of being cruel. To a lot of us education is best, and sometimes action is not. In many incidences where action has been taken it has not truly provided a positive outcome, and in most cases we lose... we may not like what everyone says about us, but stand tall and be confident because it is important they know, and most importantly that we ourselves know, that we are a proud people. This is just a point of view that some of us take, for reasons that many will never understand but we hope will respect. Because many of us have lived and are living a life of negativity, and when you are over-exposed to it, it drains your spirit - the fight is gone, all we can do is stand tall and be proud. And for most it is a fight between us (Natives) vs. them (whites) - this is what we know.

-A Dinner Guest

Racial discrimination can involve generalizations - assuming people of an ethnic group are all the same. We must acknowledge uniqueness and differences.

-A Dinner Guest



What Can We Do About Racism?

We can learn about racism. We can share what we have learned with our friends, colleagues, classmates, and family. We can come up with innovative and constructive ideas to challenge racism, wherever and whenever we meet it.

What the Dinner Guests Said

- Racism is transmitted through socialization. Racism is learned behaviour. Children are our future. We need to start with children. They need to have confidence. Lack of education and awareness can lead to racism. We must look at the language we use.
- Stereotyping is part of racism. We must make it socially unacceptable. Communication is important.
- Acceptance of racism leads to losses and fragmentation in the community.
- We must make Canada a welcoming place for new immigrants.



I hope that people will finally realize that there is only one 'race' – the human race – and that we are all members of it.
-Margaret Atwood

Racism can be based on bad information, for example, that aboriginal people get everything for free, or that the homeless are there by choice.
-A Dinner Guest

What We Can Do As Individuals

We can begin today by taking personal actions that will have a positive effect in our community. You can paint over racist graffiti. You can ask a person not to call another person names because of his or her skin color. You can write letters to television stations that use stereotypes in their programs.

The dinner guests already took action – they shared food with people of different ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages, and talked seriously about racism in their community. Here are some of their ideas for what you can do – pick one!

I want you to be concerned about your next-door neighbor. Do you know your next-door neighbor?

-Mother Teresa

Tell 5 to 10 people about what we did at our dinner – how we ate together and shared stories. The more we know about each other, the more understanding we will have.

-A Dinner Guest



What the Dinner Guests Said

- Acknowledge that racism is a problem in our community.
- Practice self-reflection.
- Speak up. Take responsibility yourself. Do not accept being the target of discrimination.
- Learn about the historic context of racism.
- Know that you are not alone when you speak out against racism. You are part of a community that values diversity and will support you when you have the courage to speak out.

- Break out of your own circle – increase your interaction with other people.
- Become friends with people from different ethnic backgrounds so you can tell each other what hurts.
- Support your children and learn from them.
- Report incidences of racial discrimination and hate bias to the police and the Human Rights Commission. It is important that we keep statistics, even if there is no criminal charge possible.
- Use technology to promote anti-racism, for example blogs and Facebook. Share ideas and keep up the conversation. Use your cell phone to film and document racist incidents.
- Join organizations that support human rights, diversity, and advocacy.
- Get your church involved in anti-racism campaigns.
- Write to the government and school boards and ask for cultural diversity programming in education. Meet with educators and encourage them to teach about cultural diversity.
- Become a mediator and use these skills in situations where you encounter racism.
- Inform City Council of issues and problems.

- Encourage government to set up a database to record instances of racial discrimination and keep statistics.
- If you are a community leader, acknowledge the problem and speak out against racism!
- If you are a businessperson, have a steel box for messages so people can report staff who are discriminatory to customers.

If the moderates of the white South fail to act now, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.



Use a racist experience as an opportunity to get into a conversation, and encourage racists to justify their opinions, and get them to think about them.

- A Dinner Guest

What We Can Do As a Group

One person can make a difference, but a group of people can turn the tide. You can begin today, with your friends, your church, your volunteer organization, and your family. You can hold events around International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21). You can engage in street theatre. You can involve groups like *Puppets for Peace* to teach anti-racism at your children's school. Here are some more ideas from the dinner guests that you can do – with a little help from your friends!

Encourage homes to be built that allow for different ethnic community living styles, for example for extended families.

-A Dinner Guest



Have Peace Meals to talk about racism and discrimination, and empower each other to speak out and heal.

-A Dinner Guest

What the Dinner Guests Said

- Conduct an anti-racism campaign until *Whoop Up Days*, and celebrate with a Friendship Concert.
- Make zero tolerance for racism stickers that businesses can put up after signing a voluntary pledge not to allow racist acts on their premises.
- Make fact versus myth posters with simple facts to counter ignorance.
- Do posters and media ads with the message "You know you are a racist if..."
- Publish cultural awareness leaflets.
- Have a contest for the best story, poem, or film about someone successfully challenging racism and discrimination.
- Invite the Alberta Human Rights Commissioner to visit and meet with people concerned about racism to encourage a proactive commission.
- Provide a forum for people to communicate about racism.



Hold workshops to train people on how to undertake conscious action, for example, role-play racist situations and practice how to react effectively.

-A Dinner Guest

Recognize role models who have addressed discrimination. Recognize good things when they happen and point them out to people. Acknowledge our heroes!

-A Dinner Guest

- Lobby for an Advocate who has the politicians' support.
- Lobby the Chamber of Commerce to provide diversity or anti-racism training to businesses.
- Lobby for zero tolerance on racism rules for corporations.
- Lobby for the city to offer language courses that introduce different cultures.
- Encourage role-playing to build empathy and understanding.
- Use public art performances to educate by depicting lived experiences.
- Support and encourage multicultural festivals and markets that embrace diversity.

- Provide more opportunities for people of different ethnic origins to mix and get to know each other, through grassroots meetings and house parties. This will enrich our cultural experiences, increase curiosity, and provide the opportunity to experience another person's social reality.
- Implement a grandparent program to bridge differences in age, and encourage friendship between people of different cultures.
- Welcome people into smaller communities, and learn the stories of newcomers.
- Invite youth on the street to create art so they can learn respect, dignity, and be involved in the community.
- Hold pop culture events.
- Collaborate with other organizations. Networking is important.
- Be inclusive in initiatives – all members of the public who are interested should be able to be involved.
- Carry out a campaign for a million acts of kindness.

What We Can Do As a Community

In 2006, in Alberta, the aboriginal population numbered 188,365, and of this number, 3,455 lived in Lethbridge. There were 527,030 immigrants, and 8,645 lived in Lethbridge. There were 454,200 people identified as members of a visible minority, and 5,065 lived in Lethbridge.

-Statistics Canada



Social change has happened in our lifetimes. In the last 50 years, we have seen the integration of U.S. schools, the fall of apartheid, and the inauguration of the first African American president. One dinner guest noted, "We have seen less racism over a generation. Sometimes older people use less politically correct terms, but if they do not intend to hurt, we can respect what they say."

Social change can begin with one person, but it takes a whole community to complete. You can work within your community to make change. As Kiari Day said, "Rosa sat so that Martin could walk. Martin walked so that Barack could run. Barack ran so that all our children can fly." It starts with you – and your community will follow. The dinner guests had some ideas about community action, too!

What the Dinner Guests Said

- Racism is based in fear, so promote understanding by implementing social programs to increase interaction.
- Challenge churches to host other *Dialogue on Racism* potluck suppers, and then come together in a larger forum.
- Anti-racism must grow from our roots – within our own community.
- Develop our training skills within our own community.
- Support community initiatives such as mentorships.
- Establish trust between different ethnic communities.
- Provide more low-income housing.
- Create work programs for youth and adults.
- Provide more programs like *One Homeless Night*.
- Provide equal protection for temporary foreign workers as for citizen workers.

Make the process for accreditation of skilled professional immigrants (such as doctors) fairer.

-A Dinner Guest



Our leaders must take control and show zero tolerance toward racism. They must acknowledge the problem.

-A Dinner Guest

- Police and corporations must stop their inaction against racism.
- Include cultural liaison officers on police forces.
- Have real consequences for racist actions.
- We must clearly define what constitutes racial discrimination, and keep records in a database so that we have statistics and information on the types and scope of racism.
- Implement standards for employers that include cultural awareness and a reporting mechanism for racist actions by employees.

- Deliver racism awareness training programs.
- Hold workshops with law enforcement and health care workers.
- Install signage that states we do not tolerate racist remarks in public spaces.
- The media can promote anti-racism.
- Create an art park for youth of different backgrounds in an abandoned space.
- Create a healing centre to work with at-risk youth within aboriginal culture.
- Include real multiculturalism in education. Encourage interactive activities about inclusion and acceptance. Teach history, culture, and traditional arts and crafts. Create a forum in schools for learning respect through storytelling and art. Develop bibliographies of books that promote cross-cultural awareness.
- Introduce philosophy in kindergarten.



*Make racism socially unacceptable.
Support those who speak up.*

-A Dinner Guest

We must teach dignity and respect at a young age.

-A Dinner Guest

The Personal History of a Dinner Guest

I was raised in a small lumber town 30 miles from Prince George, BC. A railroad went through, and Prince George was connected by a very poor road. It was worse than any logging road now in use.

In 1942, I started school and this was when they sent Japanese families to my town of Giscome, BC. Most Japanese people were put into internment camps, but, because Giscome was isolated, they were sent there and worked in the sawmill and rented company houses. They reported to the sawmill owner. The Japanese were rounded up all over the west coast and sent inland, and lost all of their businesses, fishing boats, homes, and other holdings they might have had. Many were born in Canada and some had even fought for Canada in the First World War. Government posters of the day had all Japanese wearing thick glasses, and [they] had large protruding

teeth. They were not able to return to the coast until 1947. The Japanese that lived in my hometown were wonderful people, and were never in trouble with the law. There was not one Japanese person charged with causing or wanting to harm Canada during the war or after.

At this time, and well into the 1980's, people of Ukrainian, Polish, or of Slavic extraction were looked upon as being inferior and not able to do anything but menial work.

In 1923, a Hindu worker at Giscome was badly injured in a sawmill accident and was refused treatment at the Prince George Hospital. To their credit, the owner and manager of the Saw Mill insisted that the Hindu got the care he needed. He got it and worked for many years at the mill.

The Chinese of the day were also a target of discrimination and many people talked to them in a singsong voice because they assumed that the Chinese could not speak English very well.

After WW II, Germans, Italians, Greeks, Poles, etc. were treated with disdain and called "DPs" or many other derogatory names. All forms had to have your racial extraction put on them. This was on all school forms, hunting permits, land purchased, burial documents, and many more.

The First Nations and Métis People had a great reputation as soldiers in all of our wars, but when they returned from the war they found out that they lost a lot of rights given to other soldiers. Many were denied Veterans' gratuities, and even medical services that they were entitled to from wounds or sickness during the war.

There was no law prohibiting First Nations or Métis from going into any public building like a restaurant, community hall, or church. The fact was they were often asked to leave. In many Government offices, the First Nations and Métis people were denied services that they were eligible to receive.

We might never erase racism, but we must strike hard and immediate when we encounter it.

All the best,

Roderick McLeod, Métis Elder



Summary

The same themes were interwoven through the discussions of all the dinner guests. First, we must acknowledge that racism exists in our community, and respond to it, whether we are witnesses to it, or targets of it.

Second, it is critical to develop anti-racist worldviews when children are young. This must be the responsibility of both parents and schools.

Third, we must create opportunities for people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds to interact, communicate, and build trust.

Fourth, we need a social system which is responsive to reports of hate bias and racial discrimination. The police must treat each report seriously. We must maintain records of racist incidents, so that we have information on the type and number of occurrences. Employees and customers must have the opportunity to report racist incidents at work and business sites. Anti-racism training for police, government and business is highly recommended.

Fifth, we must provide more opportunities for new immigrants to be employed in fields which use their expertise, and we must extend the same protections to temporary foreign workers as we do to citizen workers.

Sixth, we must ensure our social systems adequately address the needs of everyone – from providing art programs for youth to culturally sensitive housing to work programs for youth and adults.