

Canadian Quakers condemn systemic racism

At Canadian Yearly Meeting and Canadian Friends Service Committee we hear the calls in the streets and in the media for an end to racial violence and injustice. This is echoed in communities across Canada. The ongoing wounds of racism are open and laid bare. We demand better from individuals, from our leaders, and from our institutions.

Many of us have seen the horrific footage of the killing of yet another Black person – George Floyd – by a white police officer. This is not an accident or aberration. Unequal and unjust treatment of racialized people is not unique to the US, nor to the choices of individual officers. It is far-reaching and systemic. As just one example, CFSC's office is located in Toronto, a city where policing costs more than one billion dollars a year and where, "Black Torontonians are 20 times more likely than non-Black people to die in an encounter with police, according to one estimate."ⁱ Alternatives are possible and needed at once. Systemic racism is far broader than policing, and is found in child welfare, housing, schools, incarceration, education, and many other places.

We name, without taking the focus off of the profound racism faced by Black people in Canada and around the world, that the experience of extreme racism is shared by Indigenous peoples and other people of colour here and elsewhere. The long-term action required to abolish racism targeted at Black people will contribute to overcoming all racism, since no one will be free from the threat of racism until all are freed from it.

We condemn the ongoing systemic racism within Canada at all levels. Our work involves an active daily commitment toward justice. We also bear witness to the struggles of those who suffer the impacts of racism in the US and elsewhere. The sin of racism is not confined by borders. Wherever it is, it must be exposed and uprooted.

We acknowledge that Canadian Quakers are predominantly white and have work to do within ourselves. In doing this work, it is only too appealing for us to fall into the traps of guilt and self-loathing that focus our attention back on ourselves rather than on what needs to be done. This is not empowering to anyone, and it is not useful. We call upon Friends to commit ourselves to individual and collective change that would outwardly demonstrate our belief that Black lives matter. We call on Friends to let go of the feeling that we are perfect or know best, and to give ourselves over to the ongoing work of eliminating racism in whatever form that takes.

We call upon Friends to listen, learn from, and follow the lead of Black groups, leaders, and movements such as Black Lives Matter, keeping those leaders front and centre in our hearts. We call upon Friends to speak up, even though the topic is complex and delicate. Each Black life matters. Each Black life is worthy. Each Black life is valuable.

ⁱ Enzo DiMatteo, "Death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet Exposes the Decades-long Failure of Policing Reform," NOW Magazine, June 3, 2020, <https://nowtoronto.com/news/regis-korchinski-paquet-death-police-reform>