

## **ARC-NL Presentation Notes for Ministerial Committee on Anti-Racism**

*(31 Jan 2022 at 2.30-4.00 pm )*

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon! Thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Anti-Racism Coalition Newfoundland and Labrador (or ARC-NL). We have several members of ARC-NL who are in attendance: here to present, to answer questions, to reflect, and to witness this afternoon.

The presenters are Sulaimon Giwa, Sobia Shaikh, Vincent Estick, Monika Dutt, and Kai Bryan

In attendance also are Julia Janes and Kathleen Parewick.

Also, thank you to members of ARC NL who contributed to this presentation and who are not in attendance.

ARC-NL is a volunteer-run, community-based activist organization which works to counter racism in all its forms. Since 2017, we have worked to promote and strengthen a culture of anti-racism within the province. Thank you to all who work within the government who have undertaken anti-racist advocacy to make this possible—we are well aware of the immense amount of effort, time, care, and angst such steps take.

We also wish to thank and acknowledge the early and ongoing community-driven work to eradicate racism in Newfoundland and Labrador, by groups like ARC-NL, Addressing Islamophobia in NL, First Light, Friendship Centres across the province, BLMNL, the Indigenous Activist Collective and others, and so many other individuals who dared to name and fight against racism in our province. We owe a debt to Indigenous and racialized migrant communities who have made the province their home, despite facing structural and actual violence. Although unacknowledged by any of the communications that have come out of this Ministerial Committee, we know full well that the work you are undertaking is because of the pain, passion and know-how of early and ongoing anti-racist work in the province.

ARC-NL was born out of pain after the white supremacist attack on the Quebec City Mosque. We formed because we realized that if the same sort of attack happened here in NL, there would be little in the way of a coordinated network to counter or respond to it. We knew that leadership would not come from the [provincial] government, who had chosen a population-growth and economic agenda where “newcomers” were only useful as economic drivers. And, so, ARC-NL alongside our community partners have been building anti-racist movements.

ARC-NL has been busy these past few weeks responding to racism in our province. Responding to the white supremacist and hateful rhetoric. The flags with racist symbols that we witnessed this weekend in Ottawa and in St. John's are reminiscent of the Yellow Vests we responded to in 2019, and of the 2017 mosque shooting, and the 2021 London attack. These are the very anti-migrant, white supremacist ideas also visible within the Grade 9 textbook we are all so angered by. We are angered and calling for full anti-racist curricular review. This week we have also responded to the nonchalant, easy use of the N-word in a university classroom with our partners. Each of these incidents are tied. They show us that our province, the province we call home, the province we love, is not safe for those of us from racialized, Black, migrant and Indigenous communities.

We are not surprised that 2022 has begun in this way, particularly because we have been building on national and global conversations about anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim racism, particularly since 2020 and 2021.

## **Inaction to date**

ARC-NL members have been watching the unfolding of this Ministerial Committee on Anti-Racism with significant and skeptical interest...and hope. The skepticism is due to a number of factors:

1. First, from responses from the government to racism which are performative, statements about "reflecting" on "dark chapters," or flags at half-mast without policy change;
2. Second, from the government's unresponsiveness to earlier calls to address racism made by Addressing Islamophobia in NL, ARC-NL or other groups and individuals who have been brave enough to name, respond to, and work against racisms in the province;
3. Third, from the government's lack of any (let alone meaningful) engagement in developing the terms of reference for the Ministerial Committee: ;
4. Fourth, from a lack of trust in the expertise and political will of past and present governments to deal holistically with multiple forms of racism: anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-migrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Asian, anti-Latinx and other forms of racisms; and
5. And, finally, from government's efforts to individualize issues of racism and anti-racism education, rather than providing proactive public anti-racist education resources.

This government and its predecessors have not been responsive to prior calls to action on racism. For example, this time last year ARC-NL made a Call-Out to all the parties in the Provincial Election to frame their positions on eleven racism-related questions.

The Liberal Party offered responses to only six of these questions, none of which evidenced much of a shift beyond the administration's standing and dated *The Way Forward* immigration

action plan, or the kinds of economic imperatives that have remained the prevailing logic for provincial policies related to immigration or newcomers.

In particular, the Liberal response offered, just last year:

- **no clear position** related to hate speech and improving the engagement of Indigenous, Black, migrant and other racialized communities in political processes;
- **a status quo response** to the proposition of expanded voting rights;
- **No response** at all to handling racism in Liberal party ranks and among elected members;
- **No response** at all to concrete anti-racism capacity-building plans for political processes;
- **No response** at all to provisions for migrant workers and student health and welfare measures at that time in 2021;
- **No response** at all to encouragements for newcomer entrepreneurship; and,
- **Silence** on funding for essential anti-racism & equity-building work by NGOs here.

The Liberal response did reference commitments on some Indigenous rights issues, including:

- TRC 94 Calls to Action;
- MMIWG2S+ 231 Calls for Justice;
- upholding the principles of UNDRIP; and
- addressing ongoing issues around Indigenizing curriculum design.

However, we and our allies remain skeptical of whether these so-called commitments to Truth and Reconciliation will actually lead to meaningful, timely action. Since the TRC report was released in 2015, Canada has only implemented 11 of the 94 Calls to Action. These actions could save lives and repair harms, yet are repeatedly delayed and disregarded.

Further, the Liberal response to ARC election questions were entirely lacking in their attention to *non*-Indigenous anti-racism themes. The lopsided engagements to date appear to be aimed at delineating Indigenous from (other) racialized community interests - separating and advancing them independently. This has contributed to our concerns that a clear understanding of the complex, intersectional dimensions of racism has been lacking in the approach that the Committee is taking to the current consultations.

You have an opportunity to fix this. But you are going to have to power-up in expertise, engagement, and resources in order to ensure that the relationships with people who are Indigenous, Black, migrant and/or racialized required for your process to succeed are founded in trust and will be able to be sustained.

Every day, racialized and migrant people are told we don't belong. We are harassed, bullied, and denied voice; these are personal and interpersonal forms of racism.

We are told that we don't matter, in other ways too. and we should be lucky to live here in the province (we are told, also that we should be ashamed to ask for what we need, through public discourse and educational texts).

The Addressing Islamophobia in NL project report offers very specific suggestions on how to proceed. Other than one meeting with Minister Mitchelmore in 2019, there has been no acknowledgement and action from the provincial government.

Another poignant example: A few months ago, **The Healthcare for All Campaign** of ARC-NL and **Addressing Islamophobia** co-presented a comprehensive policy analysis on the effects of unaddressed racism in the policies and practices in the health care system to the NL Health Accord Committee. In particular, we asked that MCP be extended to ALL residents of the province, citing the immense precarity of migrant workers and their families. What was "given to us"--without any follow-up or further conversation--was an extension of 9 months for international students who have graduated and who are without work. This change did not address those individuals who were unable to retain full-time work for less than a year; it did not decrease precarity and reliance on employers who exploit migrant workers. It told many residents in the province that they don't belong and don't matter.

A few days ago, we were told that this "was the best in the country"--in other words, that the policy is better than it had been; we should feel lucky. However, the policy does not alleviate the precarity of migrant workers, nor does it support the overall health of all people in the province, especially during a pandemic. MCP policy is based on the idea that some individuals (typically: white, settler, NL-born and raised) deserve better health care than others. Like the recent example of the Grade 9 textbook and the overarching curriculum with their underlying white supremacy that reinforces images of dangerous, burdensome migrants, this MCP policy TEACHES racism. The inaction of governments and the lack of meaningful engagement with Indigenous, migrant and racialized people teaches and entrenches systemic racism.

## **Performative concerns**

We would like to ask two pointed questions to the Ministerial Task Force: How will you ensure that the anti-racist work be different than the inaction that has come before this? How do you ensure that this is more than empty lip-service, or worse, harm the residents of this province who face racism on a daily basis? You are undertaking important work.

Your willingness to sit and lead this Ministerial Committee process is a meaningful step, but we have concerns about whether your efforts will lead to genuine, meaningful change. Consultations such as this have a long history of extracting information and labour from communities without accountability. Instead, you need to identify *transformative* actions in order to uproot systemic

racism and bring about restorative change. ARC-NL sees the very nature of your current approach to consultations as one which keeps colonial and patriarchal governance intact, without centring those with lived experience and expertise of racism and anti-racism.

The Ministers and staff working toward anti-racist change must recognize that racism is not a singular phenomenon. It manifests differently for different people, depending on their history, skin colour, relationship to whiteness and many other factors. Those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, or have overlapping backgrounds, will have both shared, differing, and sometimes opposing viewpoints. A commitment to anti-racism is a commitment to a complex, multi-faceted and iterative process and outcomes. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions, and all concerned should be prepared for a lengthy process of design, implementation, learning and adjustments.

However, complexity should be a motivator rather than a deterrent. As an early indication of sincerity on the part of government, the Ministerial Committee needs to expand on its delegated role and its commitments to date, and more clearly outline how it will be accountable to Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

## **Next Steps**

ARC-NL supports the apparent intent of the Ministerial Committee to work towards the creation of a Provincial Anti-Racism Strategy. A critical first step in creating this strategy though is to ask *why* an explicit approach to anti-racism is needed. This will help you identify core principles; precisely where you fall short; where you currently lack expertise; as well as helping you understand the intersectional lens required to develop well thought-out, comprehensive, and time-sensitive plans.

Development of this provincial anti-racism strategy must move swiftly beyond these consultations.

They must move towards long-term partnerships with organizations and individuals with expertise in developing and implementing anti-racist action within our communities. Individuals with lived experience and professional experience in anti-racist organizing must be included at every level:

- In the strategizing, planning, and developing of programs and policies;
- In assisting in reviewing how services, programs, provincial governmental policies are developed
- In evaluating outcomes for racialized communities.

This can only be accomplished by true community engagement with local organizations that have been involved in anti-racism work rather than crowdsourcing data points. **They** possess the perspectives needed to best guide the strategy and implement the plans.

We ask that you give serious thought to the inclusive “ownership” this strategy requires; how a working group will be implemented; how transparency of processes will be assured; and, how to ensure the sustainability of these efforts beyond forthcoming elections.

Racism is here, it is right here, right now, in Newfoundland and Labrador. Colonialism and white supremacy are at the foundation of this province and Canada—we cannot forget this. Our province continues to be built on the ongoing extraction of labour from Black, Asian, Latinx, Arab and other racialized migrants.

ARC-NL and our partners have been and continue to be ready to confront it. Are you?

Thank you again for your time.

**Additional Points made in Q&A discussion:**

- We ask that you make public your unwavering commitment to seriously redress racism and become a leader in undergoing anti-racist organizational change in all of your own governing and administrative work. We note that the provincial *Elections Act* Review is closing today. **We ask that the government extend voting rights to all residents of the province, regardless of citizenship status.**
- We ask that the Committee adopt a “**whole of government approach**” in the AR strategy.
- We ask that any consultations you ask of ARC-NL or other, substantially volunteer-driven anti-racist groups in the province be suitably compensated in respect of the very real work their advice and experience represent.
- We ask that any policy actions taken in relation to anti-racism be overseen by a paid anti-racist advisory body, supported by professional staff in a dedicated anti-racism secretariat positioned outside of any single department to reflect its all-of-government role.
- We ask that this work be adequately funded and resourced. Anti-racist work cannot happen without appropriate funding.
- Fund anti-hate initiatives. Fund provincial programs for supporting racialized youth. Fund initiatives to redress the negative health effects of those experiencing racism and

racial discrimination. Fund any and all anti-poverty initiatives in urban and rural communities, so that white supremacy has less opportunity to take hold. Fund community-based anti-racist initiatives. Fund anti-Black racism and anti-Asian racism public awareness campaigns. Fund anti-racist organizational change processes within the government. Fund groups and organizations already doing this work, as successful anti-racist change in the province relies on keeping all of us accountable to anti-racist commitments.

In short, ARC-NL has plenty of specifics to offer.