



**“RACISM IS A TRADE UNION ISSUE:
DEVELOPING A PUBLIC SECTOR
TRADE UNION RESPONSE”**



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2004

Preface

Understanding how public sector trade unionists can overcome discrimination — in the workplace, in their unions, and in the broader society — is fundamental to the work and the mission of Public Services International. PSI affiliates participated in national consultations on racial and ethnic discrimination as part of the process leading to the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. Affiliates approved a resolution on anti-racism work at the PSI World Congress in 2002 in Ottawa, reprinted here. And affiliates in Brazil formed an Anti-Racism Commission that helped to prepare the PSI Conference in Salvador, Brazil – "Racism is a Trade Union Issue".

This Conference addressed critical issues, such as the historical effects of colonialism; the legacy of slavery; the limitations of affirmative action policies; the different forms of discrimination and xenophobia; and the importance of building trade unions with diverse membership and leadership.

The recommendations agreed at the Conference have been presented to the PSI Executive Board and will be considered at the PSI Inter-American Regional Conference in 2004 in Brazil. We hope that this Report will serve several purposes: to help trade unionists understand some of the issues; to enable trade union educators to present sessions on anti-racism work and public sector issues with their members; and for distribution to a range of interested people.

It is my hope that all parts of PSI-Interamericas will meet the organizing challenge presented in this report, set new standards for equality at work and in our unions, and lead the fight against discrimination. PSI wishes to thank its Brazilian

affiliates, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, and the International Labour Organization for their support for the Conference and this Report.

Cameron Duncan
PSI Regional Secretary

REPORT

From the

Public Services International Conference on “Racism is a Trade Union Issue: Developing a Public Sector Trade Union Response”

October 8-10, 2003

Salvador, Brazil



CONFERENCE STATEMENT ON FIGHTING RACISM and PLAN OF ACTION FOR TRADE UNIONS

October 2003

The first PSI Inter-Americas Conference on Anti-Racism Work, meeting in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, reaffirms the solid commitment of public sector trade unions to combat racism and xenophobia, in every shape and form. The 70 Conference delegates represented PSI affiliates from 13 countries in the Americas and five countries in southern Africa, and they agreed on this Statement and Plan of Action for trade unions to fight racism more effectively in our communities, in the workplace and within the trade unions.

We are getting stronger as a union movement because of the mobilizing and organizing that is taking place among our members and communities. Workers from the indigenous and People of Color communities are mobilized and looking for progressive change in our unions and society.

Indigenous workers and workers of color are an integral part of our fight for good paying jobs, improved working conditions, safe work environments, equality rights and the protection of social programs.

The historical link between racism, sexism and the exploitation of labor is one that reminds all of us of who is on our side. The racism that exploited indigenous peoples and people of color throughout the world through colonialism and imperialism is imbedded in political, social and economic systems and is still present in the structures of the wealthiest corporations in the world. These same corporations are exploiting workers today.

In our commitment to fight racism it is important to remember to listen to the messages coming from the indigenous and workers of color communities who are asking for a different kind of relationship with the trade union movement and society in general.

What do we mean by fighting racism?

In our unions fighting racism means adopting an anti-racism action plan which includes time lines, resources, and the key steps to be taken to make internal leadership structure and internal staffing more democratic. Making union structures and work more democratic includes changes in representation, inclusiveness and integration of issues and ideas.

PSI affiliates and their respective national centers must increase the number of staff working directly on anti-racism and human rights in order to advance the organizing and mobilization in indigenous and people of color communities. We must extend our international solidarity efforts throughout union work and structures in order to include indigenous workers and workers of color in organizing for international solidarity campaigns. We must assume a commitment to fight all forms of multiple oppression faced by workers of color or indigenous workers who are women, gay, lesbian, or persons with disabilities.

In the broader society, fighting racism means challenging governments to support organizations that are the voice for those who are marginalized. The trade union movement must continue to fight for proactive pay equity and employment equity legislation and programs which will eliminate the systemic discrimination in employment, faced by indigenous peoples, people of color, women, persons with disabilities, lesbians and gay men. One of the conclusions of this Conference in Brazil is to build on the achievements of anti-racism activists in the trade union movement who have worked

in solidarity with those fighting sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious intolerance, and all forms of racism. We also want to strengthen our relationship with union organizations throughout the world and progressive NGOs doing anti-racism work.

Human rights principles

Our commitment to fight racism and all forms of discrimination is guided by basic union principles such as our belief in social justice, equality, collective action and collective responsibility. As a trade union movement, we need to reaffirm our human rights principles, which include:

- Recognizing equality and respecting the dignity and self worth of all people;
- Eliminating all forms of racism, sexism and discrimination;
- Eradicating all forms of harassment, whether based on race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, or disability;
- Protecting the political, social, cultural and economic rights of indigenous peoples;
- Defending trade union and workers' rights, including those of undocumented workers.

Conference Recommendations for a PSI Plan of Action on Anti-racism work

A. Overall Framework for Action and Expectations

1. To expose the root causes of racism and its link with the economic base of racism, such as the current "free" trade agenda and corporate driven globalization.

2. To integrate anti-racism and international solidarity into our work in the trade union movement – whether organizing, bargaining or international work.
3. To push international trade union organizations, such as the ICFTU and ORIT, to follow up on their UNWCAR commitments by creating anti-racism working groups, and organizing regional conferences on anti-racism.

B. Proposed actions by PSI at international level:

Request the PSI Secretariat and regional office to:

- (1) Compile an information booklet containing existing collective bargaining clauses related to the promotion of racial equality and the rights of indigenous/aboriginal peoples;
- (2) Carry out a survey of affiliate organisations in 2005 so as to compile a report on existing policies and programmes, using the model of the PSI 1995 Equal Opportunities Survey;
- (3) Develop a training module on how to carry out mentorship training programmes;
- (4) Develop a video to use as a training tool on how unions can promote racial equality and the rights of indigenous/aboriginal peoples at the work place;
- (5) Give priority to ensuring full trade union participation in the implementation of the Global Report on Discrimination follow-up plan of action, which will be adopted at the November 2003 ILO Governing Body.

- (6) Include the UN International Day of Action against Racism (March 23) in the PSI calendar of activities and request the ICFTU and other global union federations to do the same;
- (7) Encourage PSI affiliates to adopt policies and to carry out campaigns to protect the rights of undocumented workers;
- (8) In consultation with its affiliates, identify key test cases of systemic discrimination on grounds of race or ethnic identity in the public sector to submit as complaints to the ILO Committee of Experts for violation of ILO Convention 111 (Discrimination in Employment);
- (9) Develop a discussion paper, for submission to the PSI sub-regional committees in the first instance, on how to make its decision-making structures more diverse and representative, so that all equity seeking groups are able to articulate their concerns and issues throughout the decision-making structures of the PSI;
- (10) Adopt affirmative action in the recruitment of staff at the PSI so as to ensure a more diverse representation;
- (11) Ensure follow-up to the 2002 World Congress resolution on anti-racism and international work and provide regular reports on this issue to the PSI Executive Board;
- (12) Work with affiliates and national trade union centres to strengthen regional and international anti-racism networks as part of our efforts to build a regional anti-racism and human rights network of public sector trade unions:

- (13) Encourage affiliates to lobby for the adoption, ratification and implementation of all ILO Conventions and UN instruments that refer to racism and other forms of discrimination;
- (14) Campaign together with other human rights organisations and national and regional level for the adoption of an Organisation of American States Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism, Intolerance and Xenophobia;
- (15) Carry out a follow-up Inter-american Conference on Racism and Xenophobia in 3 years time in 2006;
- (16) Ensure that the agenda of the PSI World Congress in 2007 provides an adequate forum to address issues of racism and xenophobia.

C. Recommendations for local and national initiatives by PSI affiliates

1. Integrate anti-racism work throughout union structures, program and staffing, so as to ensure the full integration of people of color, migrants and indigenous peoples at all levels. This should include:
 - Awareness raising and training programs on racial equality – including national and international legislation on equality - for union members and staff, and programs in self-esteem and cultural heritage of minority groups;
 - Emphasis on diversity in union recruitment and audits of union staff composition;
 - Implementing affirmative action measures in

union decision-making structures, and establishing caucuses for equity-seeking groups.

2. Collective agreements should have clauses on anti-discrimination and anti-harassment which includes training, aimed at ending discrimination against migrants, workers of color, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities.
3. PSI affiliates must build alliances with community organizations and groups of workers facing multiple forms of discrimination to develop a joint strategy and action program to fight racial discrimination.
4. PSI affiliates should urge their government to develop **public policies** seeking to:
 - Ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers; the core ILO conventions, in particular C111 on Discrimination in Employment; C169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples; and C143, the Migrant Workers Convention;
 - Introduce and implement national affirmative action legislation to end discrimination against migrants, workers of color, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities;
 - Provide resources for campaigns and programs to combat racism in the job market and at the workplace;
 - Develop government statistics on the public sector work force, as a basis for formulating affirmative action programs;

- Promote diverse cultural programs in the media and in communities;
 - Develop public education curricula to promote racial equality, and implement affirmative action to promote diversity in employment of teachers.
5. Participate in the exchange of good practice on the role of public sector trade unions in opposing racism and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples.
 6. Begin drafting resolutions on anti-racism and international work to be submitted to the next PSI Inter-American Regional Conference (Sept 2004).
 7. Promote **quality public services**, including adequate funding, as a key means to promote social inclusion.

Conclusion

The success of implementing these anti-racism recommendations will require the collective will and effort of the leadership of PSI affiliates and regional committees. PSI will continue to work on those recommendations specifically directed to the PSI Secretariat, with the understanding that affiliates and local unions will do the same.

Please contact the PSI Inter-Americas Regional Office if interested in copies of speaking notes or presentations.

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Public Services International is a trade union federation that represents 20 million workers in over 600 unions in 145 countries around the world. PSI is headquartered in France, ten minutes from Geneva, and:

- Employs a full time research staff, has an extensive database of transnational companies and coordinates campaigns against the negative impact of privatization;
- Employs staff dedicated to equity issues including issues relevant to women;
- Has four regional offices: for Asia Pacific, Africa and Arab Countries, Inter-Americas and Europe. There are project staff in 20 countries around the world and extensive capacity building programs.
- Works closely with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as well as professional bodies such as the International Council of Nurses and the International Federation of Social Workers.