

Media Release - For Immediate Release

Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change welcomes Anti-Racism Strategy

March 8, 2017/ Toronto – Colour of Poverty-Colour of Change (COP-COC) welcomes the launch of the Anti-Racism Strategy by the Ontario Government, which signals that racism is real, and urgently needs to be addressed in this province.

“We are pleased to see that a number of our key recommendations to the government are incorporated into the three year anti-racism strategy” said Avvy Go, Clinic Director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and South East Asian Legal Clinic. “The pending introduction of legislation giving the Minister the power to mandate the collection of disaggregated data on the basis of race, and other socio-demographic identities in order to better measure and understand the impact of government’s policies, programs and practices on racialized groups and other equity seeking communities is critically needed”.

COP-COC welcomes the inclusion of another key recommendation of its network - the population specific measures to be undertaken by the Government through the Directorate to address anti-Black racism, Islamophobia and the racism facing Indigenous Peoples in Ontario – a critical area that needs to be addressed through Treaty-based nation-to-nation relationships, and in a manner wholly consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

“These measures are much-needed, especially as we see the alarming rise of Islamophobia, xenophobia and intolerance, as expressed through attacks on Canadians of Muslim faith and of Arab heritage, the singling out of Muslim women in hijab and repeated incidents of vandalism of mosques to name just a few. We have also seen the ongoing racial profiling of African Canadians and First Peoples in both the criminal justice as well as child welfare systems, and the long struggles against systemic racism and discrimination of many First Nations who, to this day, are still fighting for such basic rights as clean water, healthy stable housing and basic human dignity” said Shalini Konanur, Executive Director of the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario.

COP-COC had also called on the government to introduce strategies to address the colour-coded systemic discrimination in Ontario’s workplaces. While there are studies that confirm members of racialized communities – both First Peoples and peoples of colour – are denied fair and equal employment opportunities because of their ethno-racial heritage or cultural background, more work is needed to better understand how the hiring and retention barriers are manifested across the Ontario labour market.

“The Premier has already undertaken some positive initiatives in this direction, such as the targeted hiring objectives for equity seeking groups and historically disadvantaged communities

Colour of Poverty | | Colour of Change

that have been incorporated into the Community Benefits Agreement Metrolinx negotiated for the Eglinton Crosstown rapid transit project” said Debbie Douglas, Executive Director of OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. “We look forward to the Directorate playing a key role in supporting all government Ministries, divisions as well as the broader public sector in adopting a similar approach to all such public infrastructure projects and investments, as a complement to their investing in Ontario-specific research that can help to inform the changes necessary to advance fair and equitable employment opportunities and labour market outcomes”.

“The Anti-Racism Strategy need also inform Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, to ensure that any policy and program measures introduced to reduce poverty are undertaken through an equity and racial justice lens” said Ahmed Hussein, Executive Director of Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office. “The government must act decisively to eliminate the growing racialized poverty gap that now leaves 60% of First Nations children on reserves living in poverty, and similarly disproportionate rates of poverty among children of colour”.

“These issues are both deep-rooted and very complex. Institutional racism affects every aspect of health and well-being, requiring more than the \$5 million currently budgeted by the government” said Mohamed El Rashidy, spokesperson for the Canadian Arab Federation. “It is critical that both the Ministry of Health become a full partner in the disaggregated data gathering and other initiatives and that the Directorate be better resourced in the upcoming 2017-18 Ontario budget, provided capacity similar to that given Status of Women and the AODA and Seniors Secretariats”.

COP-COC looks forward to working with Minister Coteau and his team to most effectively implement the anti-racism strategy and to help ensure that it is grounded upon and responsive to the needs of racialized communities – both First Peoples and peoples of colour – in Ontario.

COP-COC is a province-wide initiative made up of individuals, groups and organizations working to build community-based capacity to address the growing racialization of poverty – for both First Peoples and peoples of colour – and the resulting increased levels of social exclusion and marginalization of racialized communities across Ontario.

- 30 -

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