

## **Submission to the second session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent 2023**

**Item 5: Thematic discussion: Recognizing and addressing systemic and structural racism. A data driven and evidence based approach.**

**Jennifer Carr – President of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada**

Dear madam chair,

My name is Jennifer Carr, and I am the President of the Professional Institute of Public Servants of Canada — a union representing **more than 75,000 public sector workers across Canada.**

As President – I've **listened and learned** as Black workers have shared their unique challenges they have faced in the federal public service.

As a woman in a leadership role, I have **dedicated myself to ensuring everyone has a voice.**

While Unions have fought for the human rights and dignity of workers, I'm well aware that unions have also historically been **bystanders and voiceless** in the face of the oppression of the people of African Descent

As a Union, we are working hard to undo these failures, and to **change the narrative around unions and Black workers.** That has meant asking ourselves a lot of difficult questions and sitting with the discomfort of even tougher answers.

The time for simple conversation and reflection must come to an end. And the time for action and reparation must become imperative.

**PIPSC is fighting to bring justice to Black workers**, and to make this fight a priority for the Labour movement in Canada and around the world.

Again, the time for simple conversation and reflection must come to an end. An example of an action that we are taking, is to actively **support the plaintiffs of the Black class-action lawsuit**, filed in Canada on behalf of thousands of Black public sector workers.

Participants in the claim are seeking reparatory justice for **decades** of systemic anti-black racism and seeking an apology and direct actions from the Canadian government showing that **they have learned from the mistakes of the past** and are committed to making the present – and the future – an equitable place for Black public sector workers.

The claim alleges – and I believe – that since the 1970s, some 30,000 Black civil servants lost out on opportunities and benefits because of their race.

Participants in the class action have talked about experiencing:

- the wrongful failure to promote,
- intentional infliction of mental suffering,
- constructive dismissal,
- wrongful termination,
- negligence,
- violations of employment law,
- human rights law,
- and Charter breaches.

The claim also includes another 15,000 people who allege they were **never hired into the federal public service because of their race**.

Participants in the claim are seeking \$2.5 billion dollars in damages. They are also seeking firm and clear indications from the federal

government that **they have learned from the mistakes of the past** and are committed to making the present – and the future – an equitable place for Black public servants.

Specifically, they are demanding:

- a public apology
- the establishment of a Black mental health fund
- changes to the Employment Equity plan
- an end to discriminatory promotion and hiring practices.
- financial damages for thousands of Black public service workers.

I'm disappointed and ashamed to report that our country's federal government **has been trying to dismiss the Black Class Action since it was launched**. The government says workers should pursue other avenues, like filing a human rights complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

This is an unacceptable suggestion — particularly given that the federal government recently admitted that the CHRC itself discriminated against its Black and racialized employees.

That's right, the same government authority charged for resolving racism and other forms of discrimination had been **exposing its Black staff to anti-Black racism, sexism and systemic discrimination**.

Specifically, the CHRC has been:

- excluding Black employees from training and career advancement,
- treating them unfairly,
- dismissing their concerns about anti-Black racism in the institution,
- denying them managerial and senior roles
- and targeting Black employees who spoke out against the discriminatory institutional environment.

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I strongly feel that it is our collective responsibility as Labour organizations to ensure that every individual is treated with fairness, respect, and dignity — and that **we must address the root causes of inequality and inequity** in order to build a more just and compassionate society.

By doing so we are actively participating on every forum of the Canadian government and commenting on every program of data collection to demands disaggregation of those data so we can clearly and precisely address the systemic racial oppression in all its form that are happening within the government workplaces.

Labour organization must strive to become a **civil society partnership** with the permanent forum of people of African descent.

Labour organizations must not fear racial justice. Changing a system, an economy, and legislations that are built and developed to perpetuate the oppression of people of African descent, takes intent, it takes deliberation, it takes purpose.

**I consider this my duty.**

Thank you.