

RACISM: IT STOPS WITH EDUCATION

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21 March marked the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: an opportunity for us to reflect on the progress we have made and what we have still to achieve in our efforts to eliminate racism and discrimination.

When we think about racism, we often think of the more obvious forms, such as verbal abuse or slurs. This continues to be a problem: in 2011, around one in five Australians said they had experienced race-hate talk.

However, racism also acts in less visible ways. For example, research has shown that people with Chinese and Middle Eastern names have to submit over 50 percent more job applications to

receive the same number of call backs as Anglo-Australian candidates.

We are currently running a public awareness campaign: 'Racism. It stops with me'. It invites organisations to demonstrate their support for anti-racism by committing to:

- endorse the campaign;
- promote the campaign through their communications channels;
- identify specific activities that their organisation can undertake over the next three years to support their stance against racism.

We have been delighted with the public response to the campaign. Over 100 organisations have now signed up, including many community organisations, schools, and universities.

The 'Racism. It Stops with Me' campaign is a key initiative of the National Anti-Racism Strategy which was launched in August 2012. The Strategy aims to promote a clear understanding of racism, and how it can be prevented and reduced.

The Strategy has been developed by a partnership led by the Australian Human Rights Commission and involving three government departments – the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Attorney-General's Department, and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – together with the Australian Multicultural Council, the

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, and the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA).

In developing the Strategy, the Commission consulted with around 2500 people, through:

- 23 consultations in 17 locations across Australia, including five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultations;
- over 1500 responses to our online survey; and
- 200 written submissions.

The majority of participants in the consultation told us that they wanted to see a concerted effort to eradicate racism. Over 90 percent of respondents to our online survey said racism was either an extremely important or very important issue.

Education is a vital component of any attempt to create a society free from racism. Education does not just mean formal anti-racism programs in our schools and workplaces – it can involve a variety of responses from people in all kinds of situations committed to doing what they can to prevent racism.

Such actions can be quite subtle and yet quite powerful. As one participant in the National Anti-Racism Strategy consultation told us:

“[We should] encourage all Australians to meet someone from a diverse background, to talk to their next door neighbour, to try something different from time to time.”

This is why we are also calling on individuals to become involved in the campaign, to contribute to breaking down the barriers that allow racist attitudes to flourish, and to advocate against racism when they see it happen.

By building a broad base of support from individuals and organisations, we can draw on a diverse pool of skills and good ideas. We believe this is the best way to tackle the complex challenges of racism, and hopefully have a measurable impact on its incidence in Australia in years to come.

If you would like to join us in this endeavour, please go to our website: itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au

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