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Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada on the Call to action on anti-racism, equity, and inclusion in the Federal Public Service

Dear Clerk:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our journey thus far. In the wake of renewed global attention to the continued presence and damaging impacts of systemic racism, this past year has been a time of reflection on who we are as a department. Building a strong nation that is economically, socially, and culturally prosperous is at the core of our mission. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) facilitates the arrival and integration of people to Canada so that they can contribute to our strength and share with us the benefits of this country. And so, we strive for intercultural understanding that allows all people to fully participate in our society, regardless of our apparent differences. Admittedly, this nation-building has often come at a high cost to many—particularly Indigenous Peoples—and we know that Black and racialized peoples, newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2+ persons, ethnic and religious minorities, and women have not been fully included due to systemic racism and other forms of discrimination. This year has forced us to reflect on the way we interact with one another, and how we look at the world.

To fight systemic racism, we had to first recognize our part in it. Through our [Anti-Racism Value Statement](#), we began by acknowledging our lasting impact on Indigenous, Black, and racialized peoples which includes historically racist policies, stating our anti-racism beliefs, and highlighting the actions we will take to move forward. And in this, we stand in solidarity with all fights against forms of inequity.

In summer 2020, we created the Anti-Racism Task Force, which was pivotal to coordinating action across our department. The team has 12 full time equivalent (FTEs) employees and will be supported by funding in the amount of \$4 million from July 2021 to July 2024. We started to have frank conversations on how to build an equitable and inclusive organization. To begin this work, we sought the perspectives of the Anti-Racism Task Force, the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) team, and our employee networks. We allied with other federal anti-racism secretariats, namely those of Global Affairs Canada, the Department of Justice, and the Department of National Defence. Over time, and as a result of grassroots efforts of employees motivated to make a difference, the leadership of many at all levels of IRCC and the unrelenting communication from ██████████ and I, we have built a positive momentum for change. Our work has centered on highlighting the inequities in our

organizational culture and people management practices, and developing mechanisms for accountability.

A Shift in Culture and Mindset

Racism is no longer an untouchable topic. We have actively encouraged brave discussions about racism and reconciliation at all levels of the Department, and we have grown more mature in talking about these issues and tackling them. Many initiatives in the past year have aimed at shifting mindsets. A variety of learning opportunities including [podcasts](#), town halls, workshops, panels, [messages](#) from senior management, testimonials (from white and racialized employees), [articles](#), and resources have continually been made available to increase employee engagement (see Annex A).

One of our most moving initiatives was the trust circles. We created brave and safe spaces for our racialized employees to share their lived experiences with racism amongst each other. We and our senior management team were fortunate to be invited to these sessions, so that we could truly listen in on our employees to understand the heavy impact of their experiences.

This openness to speak about racism has been a turning point in our Department. There is a growing willingness in our leadership and employees to integrate anti-racism into our work and work culture and include diverse perspectives when doing so. We have seen a de-centralization of efforts where dozens of working groups, committees, and networks—focused on anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion—have been created across the organization in the last 12 months.

As much as we have made strides towards a workforce readying itself to mobilize, our employee networks and business areas are often held back by: a lack of dedicated people resources (often working on initiatives “off the side of their desk”), a lack of funding, and limited expertise in addressing systemic inequities (see Annex B). The pressure to meet business priorities still tends to overshadow equity concerns or considerations. Also, due to the sensitive nature of racism, many of our leaders initially expressed discomfort in holding practical and beneficial conversations with staff. However, with the support of anti-racism coaches and advice from the Task Force and the Advisory Board, we have seen an increase in confidence.

People Management

In November 2020, we launched a department-wide Anti-Racism Survey to shed light on how our staff perceive and experience racism and discrimination at work. This was a key activity that provided us with baseline disaggregated data to form the basis for the development of our anti-racism initiatives going forward. We discovered that the three main challenges of our workforce are: barriers to career advancement, lack of trust in management, and systemic biases. This may not be different from what we sometimes see from the Public Service Employee Survey,

however, it revealed a significant difference in perception between racialized and non-racialized employees with regard to race-based discrimination. This was valuable to observe.

In response to the statement, “There is no discrimination against individuals of different races and ethnic origins at IRCC,” 15% of non-racialized respondents indicated that there is discrimination against individuals of different races and ethnic origins, in contrast to 37% of racialized respondents and 56% of Black respondents. These results have signaled the complexity of changing organizational culture and mindset.

We then delved deeper through focus groups and a review of our disaggregated staffing data (see Annex C). Our findings were eye-opening: they revealed inequitable outcomes for our employees from historically excluded groups. Indigenous and racialized employees experience systemic barriers throughout their career, leading to negative mental health impacts. This was particularly prevalent amongst Black employees.

To address this disparity, we have started initiatives targeting recruitment, sponsorship and development of Black, Indigenous, and racialized employees. One example is the McKinsey Black Executive Leadership Program, which hones the leadership skills of management-level employees. While there is more work to do so that all of our employees can reach their full potential, we will continue to review our representation numbers and future targets for the next few years to consciously improve representation at all staffing levels.

Building Accountability

Our department has taken the first steps to embed accountability across the organization. Our three driving forces are: the [Anti-Racism Value Statement](#), which specifies that addressing racism is the responsibility of every employee; the Anti-Racism Sector Commitments, which outline tangible actions for each business line in the Department over the next three years; and the addition of anti-racism, equity, and inclusion work objectives to the performance management agreements of all executives. During our recent performance management and talent management assessment cycle, we specifically asked our executives how they were advancing anti-racism and identified sponsors for racialized executives and managers.

By developing accountability, we are setting a direction and establishing mechanisms to address unacceptable behaviours and reinforce positive ones. We also have turned to our evaluation experts to start developing metrics to evaluate the success of our initiatives, so that we keep moving in the right direction. We believe that through leadership and employee accountability, new cultural norms can be institutionalized throughout our department that will bring about positive and long-lasting change.

While we are progressing well in terms of determining a course for anti-racism, more work is needed with respect to improving accessibility and fostering reconciliation. We also need to further engage employee networks during the design and implementation of equity and inclusion initiatives and invite these networks to participate at our decision-making tables. In some cases, anti-racism efforts have led some members of marginalized groups to fear that they will be left behind, and we, as leaders, need to address these concerns. With this in mind, equity, diversity and inclusion is foundational to the work we are doing as we explore the workplace of the future.

As we work to make our own organization more representative and inclusive, we are also working to improve equitable outcomes for our clients and Canadians. We implemented our new Racial Impact Assessment Tool which stimulates an anti-racist approach and analysis in policy-making to complement the broader, intersectional GBA+ lens. We are exploring how we perceive bias in immigration decision-making. We have updated the Newcomer Outcomes Survey (NOS) to obtain race-based data from clients and non-clients of the Settlement and Resettlement Assistance Programs. And finally, the Oath of Citizenship has been revised to recognize Indigenous Peoples and their treaty rights, fulfilling Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 94.

It will take time to dismantle and rebuild structures built on discrimination that have been in place for over a century. We will continue to lead our department to act purposely to root out systemic barriers, to plan consciously to improve our representation and inclusion measures, and to educate ourselves as we advance racial and other forms of equity. We owe it to ourselves and every member of our society to work together to make the promise of a Federal Public Service and a Canada that is accessible, attainable, and real.

Thank you,


Deputy Minister of Immigration,
Refugees and Citizenship Canada


Associate Deputy Minister of Immigration,
Refugees, and Citizenship Canada