

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Date: 26 October 2020 Index: ORG 10/3266/2020

International Board statement on Focus Group Report

This year has seen heightened global attention to racism due significantly to the vital work of the Black Lives Matter movement. While Amnesty International has a long record of anti-discrimination work externally, including in relation to discrimination against Black people, we have not always applied a robust anti-racist approach internally in how we treat one another, structure our organisation, and do our work.

The surge in global discussion about racism, combined with some internal events, prompted the International Board to consider the issue of racism in Amnesty International, and to act.

On June 15, we made a statement recognizing racism as a systemic problem in our organisation and committing to taking action to ensure our culture is better aligned with our human rights principles. With the support of senior management, we appointed an external expert on racism in the workplace to conduct focus group discussions with our International Secretariat (IS) staff, to help us better understand their experiences regarding racism in the organisation, including the particular experiences of Black staff.

These focus groups have now been held, and a [report](#) has been produced setting out findings and recommendations. We are sharing this report publicly, in the interests of encouraging discussion, accountability, and transformative action at a time when many organisations are engaging in similar introspection.

This report confirms the reality of interpersonal and systemic racism in Amnesty International, describes some impacts of this on our people and work, and affirms the need for change. In making these changes, we will need to consider everything from small daily interactions between our people to the ways that inequity may be embedded in the very roots and nature of our organizational model.

We deeply appreciate the contributions and trust of staff members who participated in these groups. We want to say unequivocally that we believe what they have shared about their experiences of racism, the distress they have experienced as a result, and their sense that there has not always been effective recourse.

This report provides a sobering reminder that our shared commitment to our human rights mission does not necessarily shield us from behaving and working in inequitable ways. The biases and inequalities that shape the world outside Amnesty International will persist within it unless we take more effective action to create a fairer organisational culture. Holding these focus groups was one small part of the work we need to do, and we have other actions and plans underway.

This is the first time in our memory that Amnesty International has named racism as an internal problem so openly; encouraged thoughtful and prolonged discussion of it; and shown sustained leadership commitment to and investment in addressing it. While the context for this is painful, we embrace this shift as a milestone for the organisation and hope it leads to lasting change in our organisational culture.

It is clear from this report that our efforts must continue, and the focus groups report provides us with much to consider. The long-term trajectory of this work is one that we will shape together with colleagues around the movement, with continued sponsorship by senior leadership, including our next Secretary General who will soon join us.

There will always be differences among us, racial or otherwise. It is up to us whether we build an organization in which our differences are more likely to foster the kind of genuine diversity that enhances our vibrancy and impact, or to foment divisions that cause harm and undermine what we want to do together. We already know that Amnesty has abundant diversity, which is one of our great strengths. We must also acknowledge that we have some divisions that run deep, and a duty to address them.

Looking ahead, we must build on the many good things that we treasure about our organisation and set aside myths about our inevitable goodness when they are obstacles to making things better. The world needs an Amnesty International that is as inclusive, united, and impactful as it can be.

We look forward to what comes next and have confidence in the talents and insights that our colleagues will bring to meeting this challenge.

In solidarity,

International Board Amnesty International