



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

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HOWLETT BROWN 
A PEOPLE INTELLIGENCE COMPANY



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To: The International Board of Amnesty International

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A. INTRODUCTION

The International Board of Amnesty International (**Amnesty**) sent an email on June 15, 2020, to all staff on racism and the Black Lives Matter movement (set out in full at Appendix 1). That email, which should be read in full, stated that:

...

The International Board sees discrimination generally, and anti-Black racism specifically, as an issue of rights, justice, accountability, wellbeing, impact, legitimacy, and ultimately, life and death. In some cases, we also relate to the issue of racism personally.

We want to extend our care and support to those members of staff for whom this moment is particularly personal and distressing, and our apologies to those who have experienced discrimination in the course of their work with Amnesty International.

When we discussed this as a Board, we did so as a group whose members share a common belief in Amnesty International's human rights mission that brings us together in condemning racism. We also did so as individuals who sometimes have very different experiences within Amnesty International in ways related to our nationality, race, culture, ancestry, gender, sexuality, language(s), geographic distance from London, socioeconomic status, age, infrastructure in our home communities, and so on. Because of these factors, as individuals we have had more or less difficulty with our work; sacrificed more or less to do our work; felt we have had to do more or less to prove ourselves; experienced being taken more or less seriously by colleagues; have felt more or less comfortable with the dominant ways of working; have struggled more or less to comply with certain policies; have felt more or less able to raise certain issues; and have or have not experienced other kinds of interpersonal and systemic discrimination in the course of our work with Amnesty International.

The International Board reflects the larger movement, and we know that similar dynamics play out across it. What this highlights is that even at the 'highest' levels within Amnesty International we do not have equality, and that through our behaviours, practices, and systems, we sometimes perpetuate internally the very inequalities we try to change through our external human rights work. When it comes to discrimination, we are too often not "One Amnesty", but many. While for some in the organization the depth of the challenges and the intensity of colleagues' responses in this moment may feel surprising, for others this moment is a reckoning that was foreseeable and long overdue.

...

That email also stated that Amnesty had:

Appointed an external expert on racism in the workplace (including anti-Black racism) to conduct focus group discussions with racialized employees at the International Secretariat, to get an early and independent sense of staff feedback regarding systemic racism. At least one of these groups will focus specifically on the views of Black employees. This expert was appointed by and reports directly to the Board Chair.

Howlett Brown was appointed to conduct those discussions across 6 focus groups.

The key theme to be explored in the focus groups was the existence of systemic and individual acts of racism in the organisation, affording staff the opportunity to confidentially discuss and reflect on their experiences. In

preparation for the focus groups, we requested and were given access to several historic and current contextualising documents, including staff surveys and publicly commissioned reviews.

It is important to note that this focus group work was intended to explore the current and existing views, opinions and experiences of participants and provide the International Board of Amnesty with initial feedback via a 'temperature check', which could then be used to frame further enquiry and analysis.

The historic and contextualising documents were read by Howlett Brown to identify key topics and themes for discussion. These documents were not interrogated to assess in detail the historic background and the focus group discussions were not a forum for interrogation of those historic documents or to assess the validity of the remarks shared by participants. The focus groups were a safe space for staff to speak openly, with limited challenge or follow-up to the views presented. We also note that several of the themes in this Report have been identified in previous reviews of the culture at Amnesty. We are therefore aware that there has been work underway within Amnesty focusing on some of the issues we identified through the focus group work. No review has been undertaken of the projects underway within Amnesty to resolve these issues and this Report does not reflect any progress that has already been achieved.

This Report uses a variety of language to describe the perspective of different groups and refers to 'people of colour' as an alternative to 'racialized', both of which describe those who identify as non-white. It is important to recognise that these catch-all terms (like many others) can be imprecise and inaccurate. Over time phrases are rejected as outdated or offensive and new words are adopted or invented. Whilst we recognise that the descriptions used at times in this Report group together people who objectively may have little in common other than the shade of their skin, it remains necessary and important to use language to the extent it is available in order to identify the lens through which issues are being viewed and assessed. As noted below, the contributions to this Report have been anonymised and, in some circumstances, more specific identification of individuals by race would risk this anonymity.

In total, 51 staff participated in 6 focus groups. That was less than the available capacity of 60, which we reflect on below and understand was due to some general reticence about the process. Responding to staff interest, two groups were exclusively attended by black staff. One group was organised by Union representative staff and attended by a mixture of Union representatives and other Union members. Two people were not able to attend a group and separately provided written input in response to questions. Three people followed up with further written observations after attending a focus group. One person also shared an internal communication from colleagues (a Letter from Members of Finance).

To create a safe space for open discussion we asked that attendees keep the participants and what was said confidential and we committed to do the same. We would, however, note the following:

- Around 30% were in management roles.
- The majority were based outside of London.
- Many had been at Amnesty for less than 2 years, but we also spoke to several longstanding members of staff.
- Around 75% of participants were people of colour.
- The majority of participants (c.70%) identified as women.

Participants in the focus groups were consistently open and engaged in the discussion. The focus group sessions were not recorded but a note taker did attend and took a detailed note.

With the Black Lives Matter movement forming part of the backdrop to the focus groups, much of the discussion was on anti-black racism and two of the focus groups were held just with black participants. It should be noted that participants in one of those groups felt that there was a racial hierarchy within Amnesty, with '*black [staff]*

always at the bottom' and we have therefore sought to reflect the unique perspective of black staff wherever it was possible to do so given the importance also of anonymity. This Report is not, however, solely limited to anti-black racism and several participants from other racial groups were able to provide further context to the systemic issues and echoed similar personal experiences of racism experienced and observed. Religious diversity also formed the backdrop to some of the discussions.

Whilst we encouraged a free-flowing discussion, the themes explored in each focus group were structured similarly. Each group began with an exploration of the participants' general basis for knowledge of issues related to racism (e.g. training, internal structures of support, management discussions); followed by a discussion of participants' experiences of racism and the extent to which staff feel a sense of belonging and are equipped to thrive at Amnesty. Finally, each group explored what action has been taken and could be taken by Amnesty to be anti-racist.

It is notable that, despite this being a time of additional uncertainty amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, none of the feedback received identified any additional challenges presented by the pandemic in relation to race. When asked, the view expressed was that it had helped communication channels around Amnesty. We do not underestimate, however, the extent to which Covid-19 has imposed additional pressures on the organisation and will continue to do so. For example, the response of management to this report cannot be devised over email and time will need to be spent in online meetings if it is not possible to meet in person.

Finally, the full Report provided to the International Board and Coalition Leadership Team contains many quotes of what was said in the groups at Appendix 3. This was included to provide the International Board and Coalition Leadership Team, wherever possible, with direct feedback from staff. The notes were not verbatim and focus group participants did not review or approve the notes. The quotes were heavily amended to remove identifying information. Residual concerns remain, however, that it is not possible to publish the comments whilst maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Therefore, Appendix 3 has been redacted from the version of this Report prepared for publication.

B. WHAT WE MEAN BY 'RACISM'

We encourage organisations and people to engage with the word racism. That word elicits a reaction – reflected in one focus group by the observation that in Amnesty *“saying someone is racist is responded to more strongly than the racist behaviour itself”*. Racism encompasses overt racist behaviours, but also bias, microaggressions and systemic privilege and disadvantage.

- ‘Overt racism’ describes behaviours that are commonly recognised as racism, being harmful or unfair things that people say, do, or think based on the belief that their own race gives them an enhanced status of some sort (e.g. intelligence, physical, moral, etc.).
- ‘Racial microaggressions’ describes a broad range of acts or remarks that make someone feel insulted or treated badly because of their race. There may be no negative intent behind the act or remark, and they can seem benign to people who do not understand their impact. However, in combination with similar acts or remarks over time they cause significant emotional harm and stressed responses in personal and professional interactions.
- ‘Bias and systemic racism’ describes the often-subtle ways that our cognitive and largely unconscious acts embed differential treatment between people of different races in our everyday behaviours and responses.

Whilst overt racism commonly occurs with some awareness of impact, it is important to recognise that racism generally can and does exist without malicious intent or awareness. Racism is embedded in every society around the world. Intuitive human responses and the way our languages have developed mean we separate and categorise people, irrespective of how nonsensical that behaviour is when analysed, and we are all products of the societies in which we are born and live. Organisations are products of societies too, established and continually influenced by biased personal perspectives and imbalances in society.

Racial prejudice can exist across all organisations and societies, and it can be directed at individuals from majority and powerful groups. However, it is important to recognise the part that power imbalances play in racism, particularly those forms that are not overt. Individual examples of racial prejudice outside of the context of a general power imbalance is not the same as deeply embedded and pervasive racism that manifests in multiple ways. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, one way to describe the racial power imbalance is the phrase ‘white privilege’. That phrase seeks to describe the advantages that a majority and more powerful white racial group enjoys by virtue of that imbalance. This privilege is often not automatically identifiable for those who benefit. For example, a frequently occurring example in corporate organisations in Europe arises when the ranks of senior and middle management are predominately white. In that environment, a black man or woman joining a company is less likely to automatically perceive there to be role models at senior levels. That may hinder a black junior member of staff from quickly feeling part of the culture of the organisation and other issues can arise. However, in that example, a white person in a junior position is unlikely to automatically recognise that privilege of available role models. They are unlikely to have ever worked anywhere that this privilege did not exist and, therefore, absent overt racial bias in the system, will not know why some peers will consider themselves less comfortable in the same environment unless steps are taken to identify and discuss the issue.

The existence of power is also important when considering the concept of ‘reverse racism’, sometimes used to criticise programmes of affirmative action. Whilst an individual of any race can be racist towards a person of any other race irrespective of the power imbalance, the process of recognising power imbalances and making an organisation equal is not, for example, anti-white racism. If power imbalances exist, then staff who benefit gain an inequitable advantage and the organisation must recognise that imbalance in order to identify ways to make changes and work towards equality.

An organisation that wants to establish equality of opportunity and experience cannot take a neutral or 'blind' approach to its people and internal systems. Neutrality is always biased because it overlays privilege and disadvantage equally. Neutrality fails to recognise that certain categories of staff already have backgrounds that mean they will share experiences and views with those in senior and majority positions, and benefit from affinity bias as a result (with affinity bias being the conscious or unconscious preference that people have for those with certain characteristics).

The impact of racism

Irrespective of intent, the impact of racism on individuals at home and in the workplace can be extreme. A lifetime of receiving microaggressions and seeing bias in societal and workplace systems causes significant stress responses in people. The impact of stress is increasingly well understood but, in short, it can have acute short-term impacts as well as longer term health and wellbeing effects. For organisations it means that staff may be unable to thrive in the workplace. They may disengage, put on a 'veneer' to survive, and/or leave.

Examples of anti-black racism

Some examples of day to day anti-black racism are:

- 1) Othering: for example asking a co-worker where they are from, and if they say they are from the UK asking, "no, where are you really from?", telling a black person that they are "so articulate" or that they "speak/write English so well", and asking a co-worker to advocate on behalf of others when there is no context supporting that advocacy position - e.g. 'why do you all?'.
2) Fetishisation: for example asking to touch a black person's hair, describing a black person's features as being "exotic", and offering compliments based on stereotypes, including assuming a black person is a good dancer or good at sport.
3) Stereotyping: for example describing black people generally as more aggressive or extroverted and racial profiling in law enforcement.
4) Black inferiority bias: for example workplace overt or implied dress codes excluding black styled hair, speaking over black people during meetings, or re-explaining something that they have said, assuming that black people need additional support or input to achieve good results, providing a black person with feedback that they are being 'overly ambitious'.

These experiences are not exclusively directed at black people and other racial groups may have similar experiences. They do, however, describe behaviours that are consistently familiar to black people globally, particularly those living in majority white societies or working for organisations where power and control is largely held by white leaders and colleagues.

C. SUMMARY

Each focus group identified multiple examples of racism in Amnesty. However, the different groups demonstrated two broad perspectives. Participants located outside of European or other majority white countries were aware of individual examples of racism and able to articulate much broader systemic advantage (or privilege and status) and disadvantage dynamics within Amnesty. Many participants placed those dynamics into the historical and current mission context of Amnesty and analysed how it hampers their effectiveness in role in addition to resulting in problematic inter-personal interactions. Those working in majority white offices and countries were less likely to describe those embedded dynamics of privilege and focused instead on individual examples of racism, particularly microaggressions and bias that they had observed, been told about, or received themselves.

This variation of perspective may be indicative of the evolving situation in which Amnesty finds itself as it nears 60 years old. The recent Global Transition Programme restructure, with a 'move to the ground', has resulted in an expansion of staff located away from the historically powerful offices, most particularly London. However, participants in the focus groups believe that there has not yet been a commensurate transfer of economic and social capital. For example, the Sections in the Global North are often the primary sources of revenue generation and where senior leaders are based. There remains, therefore, in the experience of your staff, a significant preferential bias across all aspects of Amnesty's operations towards the London ('Anglo-Saxon') perspective, and to a lesser but still noticeable extent, the perspectives of other offices in Europe and the United States.

The report below explores this bias in some detail, reflecting the varied discussion across many of the focus groups. It also reflects the individual experiences and specific themes that were raised. Some of those experiences are serious and unreported due to what participants described as a lack of faith in the grievance process and the capability of the Human Resources team on diversity and inclusion issues. The experiences shared are not uncommon and are consistent with issues that arise across many organisations. Recipients of racist behaviour will have likely suffered and will continue to suffer emotions of confusion, shock, embarrassment and upset. We observed that staff in Amnesty have been recipients of racist behaviour and have endured these emotional consequences as a result. Staff have also experienced additional disillusionment and anger because of their perception that the external objectives of championing and protecting human rights do not translate into self-reflection, knowledge, empathy and action within Amnesty for its people. Remarks were consistently shared that the external face of Amnesty is very different to its internal face.

We are aware that the Global Transition Programme was a challenging restructure which received a lot of criticism from staff. In the focus groups, however, there was very little criticism of the restructure in terms of purpose and strategy. This may be the result of the average tenure of staff who took part in the focus groups having been relatively short. One group in particular did reflect with sadness on the devastating loss of colleagues that occurred around the time of the restructure, but the majority of participants were broadly accepting of the motivations that lay behind the restructure and did not see it as causative of issues. The only exception to that was how the redundancies process was perceived to have disproportionately resulted in non-white staff leaving the organisation.

The main work to be done within Amnesty to resolve these issues will be to recognise and rebalance the systemic privileges that exist. That process of recognition will require a broader process of education and discussion, through which individual examples of racism will become better understood and reduce. At Section F below we include a framework for you to consider in that context.

D. FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Amnesty is far from unique in having staff who can identify examples of racism in the workforce. Staff were, however, unusually well equipped to engage with the concept of racism in all forms, perhaps due to the self-selecting nature of the staff participating in the focus groups, or the Amnesty mission on human rights.

The racism identified can broadly be separated into:

- I. Interpersonally delivered bias, microaggressions and examples of overt racism.
- II. Systemic bias, largely benefitting white staff who are generally closer to or embedded in the social and financial capital of the organisation.

The detail set out below is a summary of the feedback provided in the focus groups.

I. Individual events of bias, microaggressions and overt racism and their impact

As noted in section B above, individual acts of racism can encompass a very broad range of behaviours and statements. Participants identified several such behaviours and statements, some of which could reasonably be categorised as overt racism.

Examples identified by staff included:

- Overt use of racist language, including derogatory highly offensive phrases, informal complaints in respect of which were rejected as 'overly-sensitive' in the context of 'jokes'.
- Aggressive and dismissive behaviour, particularly over email, and often directed towards staff in offices in the Global South.
- Black staff were particularly aware of their capability being questioned consistently and without justification. This included staff feeling disempowered and side-lined on projects, often with staff questioning their expertise and capability directly or by implication.
- A lack of awareness or sensitivity to religious practices which results in problematic comments and behaviours.

Detailed feedback from staff

Staff provided some specific examples of overtly racist language being used. Those included three examples of the use of the word 'Paki' and one of the 'N word' being used by senior staff.

Much more frequently, the behaviours identified by focus group participants related to behaviours that consistently questioned their capability and related to the systemic biases identified below. At times, the interactions were received as aggressive and dismissive. In particular, black staff were acutely aware of their competence being implicitly challenged in their day to day work. This manifested in:

- Central quality assurance teams questioning authorship and content, including an example where plagiarism had been alleged.
- Colleagues second guessing decisions and side-lining local staff on projects despite staff expertise, location and experience. For example, staffing local teams on only the background sections for reports or dismissing and criticising their capability without cause.
- Daily microaggressive behaviour, including touching the hair of black colleagues and comments expressing surprise at a black person's capabilities.

These behaviours have created a perception that some white colleagues have actively sought to undermine those who belong to other racial groups.

Focus group participants also recognised the impact of being from certain racial groups on their experience of the workplace. This included: (a) the stress of bearing the burden for advocating on behalf of people of colour generally, for example being singled out in meetings and asked to provide personal experiences; and (b) staff being ignored or dismissed repeatedly over email by colleagues in London. A common comment in the groups was to observe that they thought they were imagining it, but it happens repeatedly and only stops when another London or white colleague joins the email discussion.

It was not felt that this experience was adequately recognised or that the power differential in the organisation was understood. Staff felt hampered by the ‘angry black man/woman’ negative caricature. In one instance this stereotype was identified to have been openly referenced by management as applying to a specific colleague who was present.

The result of a number of these behaviours is that staff feel ‘othered’ and uncomfortable in the normal course of carrying out their roles. The focus group participants felt that there were groups that naturally felt part of Amnesty (being white, relatively affluent, and native English speaking), compared to others who consistently felt that they did not belong in the organisation and had to dilute or hide their personal cultural and/or religious characteristics.

Several participants in European offices raised concerns about a lack of awareness and sensitivity within Amnesty’s culture towards those who observe common religious practices. Examples included team socialising in London focused on visiting the pub without any alternatives and insensitivities to those who are fasting or require time away from their role to pray or celebrate important holidays.

We would note that, listening to the experiences of colleagues in the focus groups, a number of white participants acknowledged their surprise that they had not previously been cognisant of the challenges identified and recognised that in some ways their own behaviours had contributed; for example in arranging social events that excluded some groups.

II. Systemic bias

1. Historical context and centralisation of power

Many participants focused on the historic origins and purpose of Amnesty, which was to challenge human rights abuses around the world, but with staff and members largely based in London and other majority white countries. This origin and purpose is perceived to have created a legacy of colonialist ‘white saviourism’ and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ control. Each focus group focused significantly on the influence and power held by the ‘Global North’, being more specifically Europe (most particularly London) and the United States.

Amnesty is far from being unique in the human rights sector in having to deal with these tensions between origin and today’s global purpose. As Amnesty has developed, there has been a recognition of a need to transform into an organisation better able to understand the issues that form part of each mission. The recent significant restructure known as the Global Transition Programme, or ‘move to the ground’ was part of achieving this. Whilst that ‘move to the ground’ has resulted in staff being increasingly located around the world, closer to the issues that form the central focus of Amnesty’s human rights mission, participants do not believe it has resulted in a corresponding decentralisation of decision making or responsibilities. Funds are still raised by a limited number of offices and distributed to where they are required. Quality assurance teams largely remain in those offices, albeit with some decentralised Section staff in more junior support roles. This results in a centralised and often London centric perspective being applied to how Amnesty staff should operate globally.

Specific staff observations in the focus groups include comments that:

- London remains the centre of Amnesty despite the restructure, and the culture in London provides the framework for behaviours around the organisation.
- Some staff attribute this lack of decentralisation of real power to a paranoia about capability and a concern to ensure that the quality and consistency of Amnesty output is maintained. Staff observed that their qualifications, skills and professionalism are frequently questioned if they are hired in a regional office despite the intention of the restructure having been to move closer to the ground.
- Until the racism embedded in the structure of Amnesty is recognised, it will be very difficult to address and change how Amnesty operates. For example, in the way that priorities are identified.
- Staff based in regional offices perceive Amnesty's processes and operations very differently to those staff in the larger global north offices. The power bias benefits the central teams, hampering what regional offices are able to achieve.
- Quality assurance processes were raised repeatedly as a particular example of bias in processes that disadvantages regional offices.

These views were widely shared by participants irrespective of race or gender. They result in staff outside of the hubs of power feeling disempowered and a number of staff provided examples of events that had resulted in them being undermined, bypassed and/or ignored with a very London centric approach to what agenda should be prioritised. Examples included colleagues who had limited understanding of a country overruling or undermining local advice and insight. For example:

- When staff located in offices like London contact local third-party stakeholders that undermines the local staff and limits their ability to operate effectively.
- When teams outside of a country dictate the agenda and priorities, ignoring important local context. Examples included staff outside of a country or continent questioning the local expertise and knowledge of events based on very limited evidence and ignoring the importance of local priorities and input in setting the agenda for allocation of resources.

2. Training and discussions on racism

In all of the group discussions, there was some reflection on the general awareness of racism in Amnesty and an exploration of what training or discussion had taken place on the topic.

Participants generally felt that there had been very limited discussions on racism and that senior management did not actively engage with the issue. This is explored in more detail below, but there was a view that there is an unwillingness to acknowledge issues internally and many participants noted the juxtaposition between what was said externally versus how racism and other issues are acknowledged and discussed internally. Some noted the assumption within Amnesty of 'colour blindness' (i.e. being race neutral in the treatment of staff).

Every group was asked about what training on racism was available and/or had been delivered during their time at Amnesty. Two people were aware that there is online training available on racism focused on unconscious bias. One participant recalled completing unconscious bias training but considered it problematic because it was never systematically pursued or followed up. One person observed that online training was available but optional. Most focus group participants were not able to identify currently available diversity and inclusion training and did not recall receiving any training relevant to racism during their time at Amnesty.

Many other participants shared the view that training on its own is never the answer.

3. Recruitment and retention

We understand that one of the benefits of the 'move to the ground' Global Transition Programme restructure was intended to be the more effective and efficient use of staff as a resource, including by relocating existing staff and hiring new locally based staff. We understand that the available staff diversity data is limited in many jurisdictions but that the focus on local recruitment continues to develop. However, several issues regarding recruitment and retention were identified during the focus groups:

- It was observed that key roles which would benefit from a more experienced perspective as it relates to diversity are often occupied by white middle class men, with an example given being Researchers specialising in gender discrimination.
- Several participants mentioned internal promotions being particularly hard to achieve for black staff.
- Other participants also queried issues with internal promotions, with 'white straight men in London' being viewed as much more likely to be successful in progressing through the organisation. This was attributed, at least in part, to the perceptions of education qualification requirements that exist in Amnesty and the bias that applies when recruiting and promoting staff. One participant recalled that, historically, there had been a mandatory training programme that anyone interviewing for roles had to complete. More recently, however, no participants were aware of any training having been required prior to staff joining recruitment panels. One participant who had been on several recruitment panels viewed the equal opportunities form as a *'tick box exercise with no approach to [manage the risk of] racism'*.
- Similarly identified as problematic was the contractual basis on which staff are brought into Amnesty, with new staff being brought in as temporary contractors. This approach was criticised by many participants in the focus groups. Those who had been the on temporary contracts noted the impact it had on their ability to settle into the organisation. It was also identified as a hindrance to staff raising issues.
- It was noted that recruitment of work experience staff also fails to be open to a diverse pool of candidates, being generally unpaid and ad hoc.
- Finally, there is a perception that the recent redundancies disproportionately impacted people from racial groups other than white staff. Because this Report focuses on feedback from staff, we have not requested or been provided with a detailed breakdown of the redundancies made against grades or diversity data. However, we understand that, whilst senior staff were proportionately more likely to be made redundant (with the highest rate of redundancy being at the Senior Director level), at junior levels there was greater racial diversity and larger numbers of staff made redundant. The perception of staff was, therefore, that it was possible to see the impact on non-white staff *'with the naked eye'*. We understand this was raised by Union representatives and they were told that no equality impact assessment could be undertaken because there are incomplete records of personal information held by Amnesty.

We understand from focus groups participants that there remains a lack of representation of racial diversity at senior levels within Amnesty. We have not explored the statistics of the organisation but participants in the

focus groups repeatedly observed that there were very few black managers, and that many of the most senior racially diverse staff left in the recent restructure. As a result, there is a perception that senior levels in Amnesty do not understand the issues and actively fail to engage when challenged on issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Manager grade participants who contributed, however, showed significant awareness of the importance of more diverse and local recruitment and some explained what they were doing to initiate change. For example, by advertising positions via locally relevant channels rather than just using global recruitment channels.

4. The responsibility and role of management

Participants expressed different levels of support and frustration with senior leadership and middle management. In relation to race and the focus groups, this manifested in some cynicism about the focus group process and likely outcomes, against a backdrop of feeling that there had been a slow response from senior leadership to the killing of George Floyd. There was a general perception that senior management had been slow to respond internally to the killing of George Floyd and the renewed focus on the Black Lives Matter movement. Reference was also made to the use of language by senior management to categorise staff, including the phrase 'non-white' to describe people of colour¹. Participants particularly expressed doubts about the purpose of the focus groups and the impact they would have on driving change, with some cynicism as to whether management will engage with the output. We were told that this had manifested in staff choosing not to attend any of the groups. They also expressed concern that the focus group process had been set up to make management 'look good' rather than to generate an understanding of the issues.

There was some focus in this context on the approach of management being defensive 'colour blindness' rather than engaging with issues. Several participants observed that the recent restructure and having senior leaders who are people of colour meant management had a misleading feeling of satisfaction that racism had been 'vanquished.' Others again reflected on the divergence between the way they see Amnesty discussing issues related to racism externally versus how it is discussed internally.

We did not speak to any senior leaders (for example on the Coalition Leadership Team) but several more junior managers were participants in the focus groups. Managers described being 'shock absorbers' because they are required to deal with staff reactions to policies they do not control. Some managers felt that they were afforded limited support to manage these tensions and bridge the gap between the expectations of their teams and what they were able to achieve on their behalf.

There were also a few participants, particularly those who work more closely with the senior leadership level of management, who reflected on the pressures and tensions faced by the senior levels in Amnesty. Those significant and, at times, acute pressures include managing crisis situations against a backdrop of constant financial challenges, whilst also seeking to lead Amnesty's strategic development.

Others reflected on the role of individuals to push forward change and the steps already taken to move the organisation forward. In particular, the efforts by senior leaders to resolve issues identified in previous reports (e.g. the Konterra review) that had helped individuals.

5. The deployment of skills at Amnesty

¹ As noted above, 'non-white' is used in this Report and was also used to categorise participation in the focus groups. We were similarly and reasonably challenged in a focus group on the point and discussed the limitations and imprecision of language in relation to race.

Focus group participants were generally understanding and accepting of the rationale behind the recent restructure and 'move to the ground'. However, several participants identified the issue of 'ghettoization', with a lack of flexibility as to how resource is now deployed. It was described as limiting staff from particular countries of origin to working only in that country, with the exception of if you are from a limited number of majority white offices which afforded you the ability to work anywhere. This constraint included the way in which resources are strategically deployed at times of crisis, with a failure to recognise how staff in regional offices might have capability to support on events in, for example, the U.S. or U.K. (e.g. in relation to Black Lives Matter protests).

The ability for white people to move around global offices, irrespective of local experience, is then perceived to undermine the effectiveness of Amnesty's local offices to run missions and support the safety of staff. Examples were provided of staff choosing to not join missions run by white colleagues because of the additional risks that this posed to them in some circumstances, which risks were apparently not acknowledged or understood. Specific examples were provided where staff from European offices led missions and/or inputted into projects and work was produced that risked undermining a project and had to be withdrawn.

Where local experience is not being leveraged, the issues are further undermined by a lack of local insights within the central quality assurance teams that support the regional offices.

In this context it is also important to recognise the role that religion and not just race can have on Amnesty's ability to benefit from personal expertise and insights for missions. This was particularly noted several times in relation to the limited number of Muslims in its European offices.

6. Employee support; understanding and resolving issues

There was discussion in every focus group about the ways to report or otherwise resolve instances of racism.

Participants articulated a view that there is very little faith in the ability of the Human Resources ('HR') team to manage investigations into allegations of discriminatory behaviour and diversity and inclusion issues, particularly in relation to race.

Several participants observed that their only realistic escalation route would be to speak to their manager, assuming they were supportive and engaged. Union representative participants were able to identify ways that they had and continued to be able to support staff. Many participants felt that Amnesty's processes were too reliant on individual circumstances and that they had failed colleagues in the past. Many staff observed that they wouldn't raise a formal grievance because of the detrimental effect they perceived it would have for them and they had little faith that raising a grievance, even in response to serious discrimination, would result in a fair outcome. Several focus group participants, including those who are Union representatives, pointed to examples where they had supported friends and colleagues through such processes and observed the challenges first-hand.

One event appears to be severely hampering the discussion within Amnesty and the faith of staff in the organisation's ability to resolve issues of racism. That relates to a grievance which alleged reverse racism because a person of colour referred to 'white privilege'. The issue was investigated and found not to have merit, but there was significant disbelief that there had been any formal steps to investigate whether a reference to 'white privilege' was racist. White privilege was generally recognised by participants in the focus groups as something that demonstrably existed within Amnesty and needed to be understood and addressed. That privilege was identified to manifest in several ways including: (a) how a white person can travel and input freely across issues and countries (as noted above); (b) the ways in which white people engage with and critique colleagues, demonstrating an assumption of superiority; and (c) the social network that being white affords someone in Amnesty to get their objectives prioritised and supported.

It is notable that there is only one employee resource group, focused on LGBTQ+, with no similar groups for gender or race or any other personal characteristic. We understand that there were groups focused on gender and race in the past, but that both ceased to operate when staff left.

We also understand that around 50% of staff are Union member, with 249 members, of whom nearly 100 are outside of the London office. There are also Union 'shop stewards' in regional offices. However, the Union is UK based which necessarily limits what it is able to do to support regional issues (for example if staff in offices outside of the UK wish to strike).

With limited structural support that they would choose to access, staff reflected on what reliance they would place on colleagues and the general culture in Amnesty. As noted above, those with strong managers felt that they would help to resolve issues. For others they reflected on their immediate teams. There was some discussion about the feeling of a 'family', with close colleagues supporting others. For some that extended more broadly across Amnesty, but we observed that perception to be held by very few staff.

E. FINDINGS

The focus groups involved c.10% of staff, including also the comments received by email. Those staff joined from around the world. Whilst we recognise that this may theoretically have been a self-selecting group of staff interested in raising issues, the consistency of the experiences across the groups irrespective of staff location strongly indicates that the themes identified are broadly observed issues. It is also important to recognise that more disillusioned staff were said to have chosen not to attend. We therefore consider the feedback received to be a reasonable basis for Amnesty to determine its next steps.

I. Individual events of bias, microaggressions and overt racism and their impact

The participants of colour in the focus groups were unanimous in their agreement that they had experienced and observed numerous examples of bias, microaggressions and overt racism at Amnesty. They were also likely to have observed systemic issues that they described as pervasive across the organisation.

Several white participants also recognised and had observed or been told about issues (for example they had been confided in by friends or assisted colleagues to resolve issues because of their role as Union representatives). Several white participants were unaware of these experiences or the frequency with which they occurred until attending the focus groups.

The experiences broadly fell into the following categories:

1. Overt racist comments, with the use of inappropriate language. There were a handful of examples of this that were relayed from first-hand experience by participants.
2. Microaggressive behaviours were frequently observed and experienced by staff. This included examples of the anti-black racism identified in Section B of this Report. For example, referring to racial stereotypes in describing behaviour or appearance.
3. Behaviour that reflected and reinforced conscious and unconscious biases held by individuals. For example, automatically engaging with colleagues from certain countries in a more dismissive or aggressive way. Many participants noted this to be particularly problematic in email communications around the organisation.

Almost all focus group participants who were people of colour agreed that these behaviours exist and impact their ability to thrive at Amnesty. Others recognised some of these behaviours and the impact they have had. It was clear in the discussions that staff were emotionally impacted by their experiences and, even when they had taken place some time ago, memories resurfaced easily and were upsetting. Many of the focus group participants who are people of colour were able to provide examples of ways in which they have modified their behaviour and expectations to deal with this racism.

A separate but important theme in this regard related to religious literacy. Several examples were provided of Amnesty staff feeling that their religious beliefs were inadequately understood or respected. The examples provided demonstrated that, at least in some parts of the organisation, there is limited understanding of religious practices and events.

II. Systemic bias

There are a broad range of factors that influence how people experience Amnesty. Some staff describe it as a family, but for many others it is the opposite. The disillusionment for staff is particularly acute when they describe the external face of Amnesty and its human rights mission failing to turn inward with the same commitment and resolve to identify issues and make lives better.

Based on the feedback from the focus group participants, there are a wide range of systemic issues within Amnesty which have resulted in a perception of bias and embedded discrimination. Whilst all of the participants engaged positively in the hope that this was the first step towards changing the dialogue and acknowledging the challenge ahead, some of those who had experienced racism were obviously frustrated with colleagues who do not have the same experiences and dismiss the existence of issues.

The themes identified were:

1. Historical context and centralisation of power

An underlying theme revisited by each focus group was the historic power structures that remain embedded with a focus on the Global North and the large offices based in Europe. Whilst the Global Transition Programme restructure is generally recognised as having had the intention of moving Amnesty beyond this historically European centric approach and successfully resulted in moving staff and their work closer to the ground, the feedback indicates that this has not resulted in staff in those global offices feeling empowered to determine internal strategy (e.g. recruitment) or externally (e.g. mission priorities). This has reinforced tensions that were identified in previous reports and demonstrates the need to have an ongoing strategy and vision to continue the original objective of the move to the ground restructure.

2. Training and discussions on racism

The organisational literacy on racism and training available to staff was discussed in each focus group. Very few participants were aware of the training that is available. Despite this, the participants had a high level of awareness of issues related to discrimination including racism, through their own personal experience and/or their work in human rights. However, it was apparent that staff feel that the level of discussion internally is poor and actively avoided in relation to race. The lack of training means that, absent management driven discussions, there is no structure for staff to build an empathetic understanding of the experience of racially diverse colleagues or identify ways in which structural bias manifests.

The human rights mission of Amnesty was referred to frequently as hampering the ability of staff to openly discuss problems within the organisation. There was a general recognition that the preferred approach has been 'colour blindness' (i.e. race neutrality). This is problematic as an approach because it prevents organisations understanding the varied experiences of different races within it, and therefore prevents the creation of a culture and system of equality.

3. Recruitment and retention

Given the scope of the focus groups, we did not attempt a full review of the ways in which structural racial bias may have manifested in Amnesty's systems and processes. We did, however, focus on recruitment and promotion as an obvious area where bias is likely to impact racial groups.

We have not seen any statistics before and after the restructure and understand that the data held is limited. There is, however, a strongly held view amongst staff that people of colour were disproportionately impacted by the restructure (we would note that this may be because of the cuts to junior staff, at which levels racial diversity is greater). The feedback in the focus groups was also consistent that it is more difficult for people of colour to progress and, when they do, they struggle to thrive. We understand that there is currently a lack of representation of racial diversity at senior levels and, absent targeted and systemic interventions, it seems unlikely that the recruitment of more diverse staff in the global offices will filter through into management and senior management level appointments.

It was also noted by many that bringing staff in as standard on temporary contracts is problematic. Whilst this may be done to manage headcount and costs, we agree with participants that, viewed through a diversity and inclusion lens, it results in staff who are newer to the organisation being unable to settle securely in role and has a number of potential side effects (as referenced below in relation to resolving issues).

4. The responsibility and roles of management

Seeing racial diversity at senior levels is increasingly important to staff in organisations and third-party stakeholders as it is a tangible demonstration of the equal availability of opportunity and can also facilitate the creation of a more diverse and inclusive culture generally. We noted in the focus groups that staff expressed frustration with senior management and cynicism about their willingness to support real change. The reasons for this are complex and were not explored in our work. However, in our experience, having greater diversity at management level assists leadership to engage with staff more positively.

That engagement is key to unlocking resilient change and a culture of anti-racism. Whilst all staff can play an important role in driving change, they can only do so with strong direction and sponsorship from senior management. Further, as reflected in the focus groups, some staff feel uncomfortable being advocates for all people of colour. It is also unrealistic and potentially problematic to rely on a few members of staff as representative of everyone with whom they might share some racial heritage. It is therefore imperative that senior management sets the anti-racism agenda, supported by internal input and consultation where necessary.

5. The deployment of skills at Amnesty

The combination of the recent restructure with (i) the remaining centralisation of power; (ii) the lack of internal reflection on racial tensions; (iii) the perceived barriers to promotion and opportunities for non-white staff, and black staff in particular; and (iv) the limited racial diversity of those in senior roles, has resulted in the perceived 'ghettoization' of the organisation. White staff are considered able to move flexibly across offices and projects irrespective of pre-existing expertise, often in positions of seniority, but people of colour are limited to their country of origin. This requires further analysis but may result in several problems for Amnesty in that it fails to make best use of staff as well as:

- disempowering the offices and the people who hold the expertise to effectively pursue and execute Amnesty's mission;
- reinforcing power imbalances and tensions; and
- creating scenarios where local tensions and issues may not be adequately understood by those leading projects.

6. Employee support; understanding and resolving issues

Every organisation needs strong structures to support staff. This includes ways in which to understand and resolve issues, both informal and formal. This is particularly important for an organisation like Amnesty where staff do important, high profile, and, at times, dangerous and upsetting work.

We are aware that significant efforts have been made in recent years to improve wellbeing support for staff. In the context of discussing management responses to issues, one member of staff reflected how helpful this support had been. Most of the feedback in the focus groups instead focused on the ways in which Amnesty understands and resolves serious issues, particularly the raising of grievances and formal whistleblowing processes. In relation to those processes, it was clear that the staff we spoke to had little trust in the way in which such issues were resolved.

This lack of trust is particularly problematic for the broader culture of Amnesty because it means that issues tend not to be raised until an acute phase has been reached, which is then much harder to resolve. Senior management are also then likely to only learn of problems relatively late, often beyond the point when they can manage an issue for which they will be held accountable.

Added to this, staff on temporary contracts are less likely to raise issues given the uncertainty of their employment position. This concern was reflected in focus group comments.

F. A FRAMEWORK TOWARDS ANTI-RACISM

If societies have embedded structural racism, then without ongoing hard work and a commitment to being anti-racist, the people in that society and the organisations in which they work will reflect those biases, prejudices, disadvantages or privileges, determining how they will be treated based on personal characteristics they did not choose and cannot change. As noted at section B above, neutrality of approach is not anti-racist. It is necessary to actively interrogate bias and privilege to identify racism and active steps are needed to make an organisation and its staff anti-racist. That process of interrogation requires increasing the knowledge and empathy of all staff, understanding the experiences of those who are minorities and/or dealing with a significant power differential because without that knowledge and empathy they will always be at a disadvantage and more likely to fail. And the organisation will lose the significant benefits that true diversity offers, replacing it instead with a severely stressed system. The feedback provided by staff demonstrates that a framework is required to help Amnesty and its staff to work towards being anti-racist.

Amnesty's external purpose, vision and values does not exempt it from the need for inward reflection, but it does present unique challenges. Every organisation struggles to recognise embedded racism and individuals react negatively to being told that their behaviours are racist. But in Amnesty it may be even harder to accept racism because of the external mission.

It was generally recognised by participants that these focus groups could only be part of a process. For an organisation to become resiliently anti-racist, equality and the importance of diversity and inclusion need to be assessed as a core operational control and management value. That requires:

- I. Knowledge – actively engaging to recognise bias and racism
- II. Empathy – being self-reflective and open to different perspectives
- III. Action – identifying how to be anti-racist and what action to take

I. Knowledge – actively engage and recognise bias and racism

The building of knowledge is a long-term process with formal and more informal steps. Whilst training by external providers can be an expensive overhead to balance against competing priorities, we have also included below some ideas that can be resourced internally.

We would strongly recommend that Amnesty consider the following:

- (i) The feedback provided in the focus groups indicates that staff do not have a consistent awareness of the experiences of their colleagues. As we were only able to speak to around 10% of staff, we would recommend that the thematic feedback provided in the focus groups be set out in a separate document, such as a communication from the Board, reflecting on what has been learnt.
- (ii) We would also recommend the creation of a bespoke mandatory training programme for all staff with a subset of that training specifically tailored for leadership, management, and HR staff. For example, you may wish to create mandatory video content for all staff as part of an annual risk and controls framework, which would form the building blocks for more interactive training on a video conference or face to face. That latter training should be focused on Amnesty's unique challenges and use realistic scenarios with tailored solutions to establish best practice. It should also be tailored to roles in order to facilitate discussion and questioning.

Amnesty may wish to consider more creative ways to consistently combat the causative factors that lead to structural racism as part of an agenda to drive diversity and inclusion. There are many ways to support that agenda. Based on the focus group feedback, we suggest considering two broad ideas:

- (iii) Because of the external purpose of Amnesty, staff levels of sophistication and engagement on the issue of racism are relatively high. It may be possible to leverage that internal resource to facilitate a debate and discussion about the history and legacy of Amnesty's founding and its impact on the structure of Amnesty and the work it does today.
- (iv) Staff may benefit from structured ways to learn about other cultures and events. We would recommend leveraging technology (the intranet, video conferencing events, online staff meetings) to consistently celebrate and raise awareness of religious and other events around the world. This would then, in a very positive and light-touch way, support staff in recognising events of relevance to colleagues, for example explaining when and why they may be fasting, or when working patterns may need to be more flexible.

II. Empathy – be self-reflective and open to different perspectives

There is a gap in knowledge and, therefore, an empathy gap between staff who see and experience Amnesty in very different ways.

The training recommended above cannot be a once and done in the organisation. It must be reflected on by staff and openly engaged with in order to equip them with the tools to identify actions. That building of knowledge, leading to empathy, can be supported by:

- (i) Following up on training with tips and requirements. For example, unconscious bias training has been largely ineffective across most organisations because it has been optional and/or observational at a particular point in time. Most unconscious bias training had no asks of individuals or practical follow-up. By contrast, if after unconscious bias training the recruitment processes of an organisation was assessed for unconscious bias gaps, followed by managers with recruitment responsibilities receiving specific training on combating bias when recruiting, that would be more effective.
- (ii) Recognising the pitfalls of traditional training programmes and anticipating staff responses. Simply telling staff what not to do is likely to be much less effective than empowering management and staff on what action to take in order to be anti-racist allies. For example, equipping all staff with ways to identify and understand the impact of microaggressions and speak to colleagues in a way that elicits an engaged response will be more impactful and positive for the organisation than staff only feeling empowered to spot and formally report examples of overt racism.

III. Action - identify how to be anti-racist

At the end of this section we include suggestions from staff as to next steps. We include them here for insights on staff perspectives and do not endorse them. We have, however, reflected on those suggestions in making our recommendations.

Recommendations

The most powerful and long-lasting change will come from within Amnesty, leveraging the people who know it best. We would recommend that the Board considers the following steps, recognising that many of these will be part of a long-term programme rather than immediate 'quick wins':

- (i) Articulate anti-racism as a core unchanging and internally focused value of Amnesty as distinct from a current priority (with priorities being subject to change over time).
- (ii) Review processes such as work experience, recruitment, promotion, performance reviews, disciplinary and supply chain for systemic bias and discriminatory practices. This should include a review of what data is held on staff across the organisation and what more can be done to collate meaningful records so that assessments can be undertaken to inform management of the equality impacts of decisions.
- (iii) Assess what more could be done to further progress and embed the original goals of the Global Transition Programme; increasing Amnesty's relevance by strengthening its work with local activists and developing the diversity of its membership outside of European and North America, to better align Amnesty's resources and priorities through a fundamental restructuring of the movement's resources. Based on the feedback received in the focus groups, the move to the ground is underway but there is more to be done to transition decision making and power to offices beyond London in particular.
- (iv) Explore the establishment of Employee Resource Groups. These groups can serve many purposes, offering knowledge, support, and driving change. These are usually run by interested staff for defined groups but welcoming of all staff. They hold events, input into initiatives and raise awareness. It is key to have senior leaders as part of these groups to learn and advocate on their behalf, but the agenda must be driven by staff. However, there needs to be adequate investment in these groups and recognition of staff time and contribution. We would recommend speaking to staff to identify what the key aims of any such groups would be and how best to build them into a network of power and influence.²
- (v) Senior leaders should consider how to practically demonstrate their openness to questioning and challenge and provide a structure for doing so. For example, exploring town hall style forums with pre-submitted questions in an interview format. This will provide an outlet for general staff issues. It can also facilitate management transparency and help staff generally to focus on solutions.
- (vi) Proactively engage with the root causes of grievance investigations to tackle the source of issues rather than the outcomes. Grievance investigations are by their nature difficult and involve a retrospective assessment of behaviours. They can result in the polarising of views, defensive protectionism and blame. The Board may wish to consider how to receive reports on the themes of investigations and whether it would be appropriate to periodically report on those themes to staff, in combination with a senior leadership response.
- (vii) Provide management with more support and guidance to be strong people managers and carry out their roles with equality in mind.
- (viii) Establish a process by which the trust between staff, leadership and HR can be re-established. We recommend that establishing an anonymous and independent route for addressing complaints in the context of race and all forms of alleged racist behaviour would support re-establishing that trust. We understand that you have engaged an external HR provider to undertake and address all forms of staff complaints and that this may include whistleblowing complaints. This is an important step forward. However, we would recommend that you assess whether this third party has the necessary expertise to address complaints in the context of race and racism.

If should be noted that none of the senior leadership team were spoken to as part of the focus groups. This was a known gap and outside of the scope of our instruction. The experiences of senior leaders, including the

² <https://hbr.org/2017/08/deloittes-radical-attempt-to-reframe-diversit>

pressures they experience, is an important aspect of building a resilient anti-racist culture. The senior leaders are also members of staff and their experiences and the challenges they face in addressing some of the themes referred to above, should be given due consideration.

Suggestions from staff

The Letter from Members of Finance (email dated 23 June 2020) is a good example of the rich resources available to Amnesty due to the depth of capability of its staff. That letter suggests reviewing Amnesty's:

- a) *vision & strategy;*
- b) *training;*
- c) *culture & activism;*
- d) *equality, diversity and inclusion leadership;*
- e) *recruitment and supply chain;*
- f) *equality of work experience opportunities; and*
- g) *disciplinary procedures.*

In focus groups, the suggestions for actions were equally wide ranging. Comments are included in Appendix 3 and were not explored in depth in the focus groups, but they can be summarised as:

- a) Engage with racism differently, with specialised external support, being mindful not to require people of colour to drive change.
- b) Improve training.
- c) Make changes to hiring practices.
- d) Reflect on how teams across Amnesty can work together more flexibly on external projects.
- e) Improve the grievance process.
- f) Change how Amnesty's agenda is determined, rebalancing priorities across the Global North and Global South.
- g) Learn from Covid-19, with remote online video conferencing having afforded those outside of London equality of connection to their colleagues.

Appendix 1
Email from International Board

Sent: June 15, 2020 11:52 AM

Subject: Statement from the International Board on Amnesty International, racism, and Black Lives Matter

MESSAGE SENT ON BEHALF OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOARD // MESSAGE ENVOYÉ AU NOM DU BUREAU EXÉCUTIF INTERNATIONAL // MENSAJE ENVIADO EN NOMBRE DE LA JUNTA DIRECTIVA INTERNACIONAL

*** English * Français [to follow] * Español [to follow]***

Black Lives Matter.

Those words should be so completely self-evident that it is unnecessary to say them. Yet how urgently they need to be said, and how vital it is that, now, they are being said so loudly and clearly by people rising up all around the world.

In some ways, this global moment of outrage, grief, and demand for accountability and justice is about the brutal police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. And that killing - that outrageous abuse of power and arrogant disregard for a Black man's life even as he pleaded for it over a sickening eight minutes and forty-six seconds - would alone be enough to justify this moment.

However, we know that this moment is not only about police killing one man. It is about the ideas and systems that emboldened those officers even as others urged them to stop, and that affect the daily lives of Black people in myriad ways large and small. It is about the injustices and indignities that have marked the lives and deaths of Black people around the world for centuries, and that have not abated, as we have seen from subsequent tragedies such as the deaths of 29-year-old Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Canada on May 29 and 5-year-old Miguel Otávio Santana da Silva in Brazil on June 2.

It is also about the other communities standing in solidarity with Black people, who in many cases see the connections between the killing of George Floyd and the ways that their own people have been oppressed.

We are at a potential turning point, a historic moment to use this mobilization to transform race relations, and especially the position of Black people, in a world that is deeply and structurally racist. We must not take this transformation for granted; there are those who will actively resist it or who will be complicit with a status quo that benefits them, and there will be backlash to any progress.

For Amnesty International, it is absolutely clear which side we must stand on. We must stand resolutely with the movement which asserts that Black Lives Matter, because we stand for human rights, for the fundamental equality and dignity of every human, and their right not to be discriminated against. In espousing these values, we must also acknowledge the important role of generations of Black people around the world in shaping the human rights movement through their intellectual leadership and struggles for liberation.

Many of Amnesty International's entities have been stepping up in this moment, rapidly mobilizing people and resources in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. And of course, some of our entities have had rich, years-long programs of work for Black people's rights and equality locally and globally.

We wholeheartedly support this work, but that work is not what this statement is about. This statement is about looking inwards at issues of racism, discrimination, and inequality in Amnesty International.

We want to thank our International Secretariat staff for calling on leadership to say something about this. You are right to expect to hear from us, and your calls gave greater urgency to conversations and work that we have had underway for some time.

The International Board sees discrimination generally, and anti-Black racism specifically, as an issue of rights, justice, accountability, wellbeing, impact, legitimacy, and ultimately, life and death. In some cases, we also relate to the issue of racism personally.

We want to extend our care and support to those members of staff for whom this moment is particularly personal and distressing, and our apologies to those who have experienced discrimination in the course of their work with Amnesty International.

When we discussed this as a Board, we did so as a group whose members share a common belief in Amnesty International's human rights mission that brings us together in condemning racism. We also did so as individuals who sometimes have very different experiences within Amnesty International in ways related to our nationality, race, culture, ancestry, gender, sexuality, language(s), geographic distance from London, socioeconomic status, age, infrastructure in our home communities, and so on. Because of these factors, as individuals we have had more or less difficulty with our work; sacrificed more or less to do our work; felt we have had to do more or less to prove ourselves; experienced being taken more or less seriously by colleagues; have felt more or less comfortable with the dominant ways of working; have struggled more or less to comply with certain policies; have felt more or less able to raise certain issues; and have or have not experienced other kinds of interpersonal and systemic discrimination in the course of our work with Amnesty International.

The International Board reflects the larger movement, and we know that similar dynamics play out across it. What this highlights is that even at the 'highest' levels within Amnesty International we do not have equality, and that through our behaviours, practices, and systems, we sometimes perpetuate internally the very inequalities we try to change through our external human rights work. When it comes to discrimination, we are too often not "One Amnesty", but many. While for some in the organization the depth of the challenges and the intensity of colleagues' responses in this moment may feel surprising, for others this moment is a reckoning that was foreseeable and long overdue.

This should not shock us. Anti-Black racism and other oppressive systems are deeply embedded in cultures and institutions around the world, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and inequities, and creating incalculable harm through countless millions of injustices.

Amnesty International is a part of this world. Indeed, racism is encoded into Amnesty International's very organisational model, which has been shaped by the colonial power dynamics and borders that were fresh at the time of our founding in 1961. Despite some notable and hard-won changes in recent years, control and influence over our resources, decision-making, human rights work, and methodologies has remained overwhelmingly in the hands of entities in and people from the white-majority Global North. We have not engaged in robust collective discussion about the relationship between the North's current wealth, power, privilege, and dominance, and its history of human rights violations against Black, Indigenous, and other racialized peoples, and how we can ethically address this in the way we raise funds, work together, make decisions, and share resources. Attempts to discuss these systemic issues have sometimes been emotional and fraught. And while our global attempt to "move closer to the ground" has represented a significant effort to make some necessary shifts, we have not yet fulfilled our full ambitions for this program of change. All of this matters: as Salil Shetty reminded us in 2018 in his speech on decolonising human rights, "When our power, money and decision-making comes from the North, we send a message about the moral authority of the North; and we lose our organic connection with struggles in other parts of the world."

We know that racism has also been manifested in organisational failures. At the International Secretariat, there have been bias and insensitivity in the way some people have been treated, from

offhand comments to our handling of complaints to our recruitment processes. There has not always been sufficient accountability for this, or appropriate action and investment to prevent it from happening again. The International Board has also not always done enough in its oversight role, including ensuring that management is leading the necessary culture change, or that efforts to address issues of equity and discrimination were properly resourced and implemented.

Just as we need to consider and change the power dynamics in Amnesty International globally, we must also confront these dynamics nationally and locally, starting by asking hard questions about who is seen as belonging, who makes decisions, who receives (how much) pay for their work, whose human rights struggles are prioritized, whose leadership and labour are recognized, who is treated as an equal partner, and so on. We know that many of our entities are already considering such questions, and we urge all of you to take up this work, and to specifically consider how anti-Black racism is relevant within your national contexts.

These are not challenges that Amnesty International can fix quickly, but we have a moral obligation to act, and to honour and build on the commitments, efforts, and achievements of so many across the organization over the years. As the Kenyan political and environmental activist Wangari Maathai said, “Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking.”

The International Board does not have all of the answers yet, and our immediate options will be constrained by the challenges of Covid-19 and the related financial stresses we are facing. However, our commitment is genuine, our engagement with issues of bias and discrimination has been ongoing, and we recognize the focus and drive of this moment as offering an important opportunity. We have already done the following in 2020:

1. Appointed an external expert on racism in the workplace (including anti-Black racism) to conduct focus group discussions with racialized employees at the International Secretariat, to get an early and independent sense of staff feedback regarding systemic racism. At least one of these groups will focus specifically on the views of Black employees. This expert was appointed by and reports directly to the Board Chair.
2. Agreed with management that we will appoint an external expert to conduct a more comprehensive and robust review related to issues of racism and discrimination at the International Secretariat, and seek recommendations regarding necessary changes.
3. Made attention to diversity and inclusion considerations one of our priority metrics for interviewing and appointing the recruitment firm to assist with our Secretary General recruitment.
4. Specified in our Secretary General recruitment package that the desired candidate will have "Demonstrated understanding of issues of interpersonal and institutional bias and discrimination (particularly related to gender and race), and experience in fostering more equitable organizational processes, policies, and culture."
5. Renewed discussions on the work achieved to date under International Council Meeting Decision 5 on Gender and Diversity, as well as the obstacles to full implementation of the Decision, and how the movement can continue making progress with this work.

This is only a start, and we have other ideas under discussion.

As Amnesty International does this work, we will have to ensure the following:

- we commit to real, mature, and progressive engagement with the call of the US activist and writer Angela Davis to become not just a non-racist organization, but an anti-racist organization;

- we recognise the difference between anti-racism work which is about addressing racial inequity, and what is often called “diversity and inclusion” work which may be more about human variation decontextualized from analysis of power and privilege;
- we treat anti-Black racism as a distinct phenomenon that all non-Black people may participate in and benefit from;
- we prioritize the safety and wellbeing of Black and other racialized people in our efforts, protect them from backlash, and treat them with care and sensitivity, recognizing frustration, anger, grief, and other such reactions to racism as valid;
- we recognize that our individual commitments to human rights do not prevent us from perpetuating racism;
- we recognize the intersection of racism with other forms of discrimination such as sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism;
- we recognize that learning and accountability are ongoing processes and will not be achieved through one-time measures;
- we learn the lessons of past unsuccessful efforts and do not make commitments unless we have a plan for meeting them;
- we ensure assessment and accountability are embedded into our practices; and
- we recognize and draw on the knowledge of those with relevant lived experience in the organization without unduly burdening them, and acknowledge that leadership on these issues has often been informal and uncompensated.

Above all, we must embrace the challenge of change. Our movement as a whole must grapple with how we can act justly with one another, and as a truly equal, global community. We must hold ourselves to the same standards we so insistently and rightly ask of others. We owe this to one another, and to those we work for and with.

As people who have come together because we care about building a better world, the Board believes we are up to the challenge.

In solidarity,

The International Board



International Secretariat, Amnesty International
 Easton Street, London, WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

Appendix 2

List of Contextualising Documents Provided to Howlett Brown

[Page 27 redacted]

Appendix 3

Focus Group Quotes

[Pages 28 – 44 redacted]

Appendix 4

About Howlett Brown

We are a people intelligence company specialising in internal investigations, culture and people consulting solutions. We exist to help organisations operate their business in an environment where people risk is low and inclusion, integrity and revenue thrive.

At Howlett Brown we have over three decades of experience in investigations, legal services, workplace conduct and culture and inclusion strategy. We bring together our experience and expertise to provide hands-on support and strategic solutions for addressing and remediating all people related issues.

Our approach to people intelligence is unique. We offer an integrated solution which not only remediates all employee issues when they arise but also the culture that underpins them. We provide solutions which imbed preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of people related issues reoccurring.



Laura Durrant – Lead on focus groups and the Amnesty International Focus Group Report.

Laura.Durrant@howlettbrown.com

Laura Durrant is a senior lawyer with extensive investigative, regulatory and litigation experience. After training and working for several years in private practice, in 2010 Laura became Head of Litigation, Regulatory & Investigations at a global bank, dealing with many of the financial service sector's highest profile issues following on from the 2008 financial crisis. In 2018 Laura became a Partner at a major international law firm in its disputes practice.

Laura is an expert at helping regulated entities and individuals to manage complex emerging issues and investigations, frequently with an associated regulatory interplay. That experience has required detailed assessments of cultural issues and questions of individual accountability.

Laura undertakes a diverse range of investigation and consulting services. That work includes but is not limited to:

- Pro-active cultural assessments - helping management to understand how inequality and systemic challenges for minority groups can undermine diversity and inclusion
- Investigations into cultural and conduct issues
- Advising companies and individuals on strategic investigations
- Representing individuals under investigation by regulators

- Training for teams undertaking investigations and assessments of associated systems and controls

Laura has appeared on numerous panels discussing issues related to legal and regulatory developments and challenges. She is also a vocal advocate and speaker on topics related to diversity and inclusion.



Charlene Brown

charlene.brown@howlettbrown.com

Charlene Brown is the co-founder of Howlett Brown and has over a decade of legal and financial services experience providing strategic employment law advice on a range of contentious and non-contentious employment matters including investigations, bullying, harassment and discrimination, whistleblowing, culture, diversity and inclusion, data breaches, breach of confidentiality, pay reporting and training. Charlene has extensive EMEA employee investigations experience which includes conducting and advising on complex, small and large investigations across a broad range of industries. Her experience includes privacy law, cybersecurity law and corporate governance.

Charlene also counsels on best practice for corporate diversity initiatives, diversity networks and startups. Charlene serves on the UK's Employment Lawyers Association working party and has contributed to the McGregor-Smith Review and the Ethnicity Pay Gap consultation. Charlene also serves on the advisory board of TNON, an organisation focused on the development of network leaders and the strategic advancement of employee resource groups to better serve businesses and diverse communities.

In 2016, Charlene was named the Black British Business Awards Financial Services Rising Star and in 2017 Charlene was named the Legal Diversity Rising Star. In 2017 she was also recognised as a Future Leader by EMpower and the Financial Times (ranked no.2 out of 30).