

Deputations

City of Edinburgh Council

10.00 am Thursday, 11th March, 2021

Virtual Meeting - via Microsoft Teams

Deputations

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CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

11 MARCH 2021

DEPUTATION REQUESTS

Subject	Deputation
3.1 In relation to item 8.3 on the agenda – Motion by Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron – United Nations Anti-Racism Day #worldagainstracism Day of Action	Stand Up to Racism Edinburgh

Written Submission to Edinburgh Council Meeting 11th March 2021

I refer to Agenda Item 8.3.

I am writing in support of the motion to be moved by Councillor Cameron on the subject of United Nations Anti-Racism Day #worldagainstracism Day of Action.

I very much welcome the motion, and hope it is carried unanimously.

On Saturday 20 March 2021, World Against Racism & Fascism - an international coordination of anti-racist movements - will come together for UN Anti-Racism Day to oppose all forms of racism and fascism in a global day of action.

UN Anti-Racism Day was originally inaugurated to commemorate the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, a demonstration campaigning against apartheid laws.

Stand Up to Racism has organised demonstrations across the UK for a number of years now on International Anti-Racism Day. They would usually take place in Glasgow, Cardiff and London. But this year, with safety concerns due to the pandemic, it would not be appropriate to hold those mass demonstrations. On that basis, we have taken the decision to do whatever we can, in as many localities as possible, to show that the majority of people reject racism.

Stand Up to Racism Edinburgh will be holding an online rally from 1pm to 2pm on 20 March, which will be followed by a UK-wide online event at 5pm.

Here is a link to the FaceBook page advertising the Edinburgh event
<https://fb.me/e/2qAD6WJrF>

Speakers at the Edinburgh rally will be:

Professor Geoffrey Palmer

Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron

Owen Thompson (MP for Midlothian)

Mercy Kamanja (campaigner for the enfranchisement and inclusion of marginalised groups, particularly those of African ethnic identity, in Glasgow)

Aisha (Edinburgh University student in Black Ed, which successfully campaigned for the renaming of David Hume Tower)

Chair: Dr Talat Ahmed

Here is a link for the UK-wide event. <http://www.standuptoracism.org.uk/march-20-2021-un-anti-racism-day-national-day-of-action/>

Stand Up to Racism is supported by the TUC, STUC, Edinburgh TUC and all the main trade unions. It is also supported by many faith groups.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, conditions have been created in which racism can thrive. In our city, amongst many others, we have seen disgusting racist attacks on people from the East Asian community. These have included, amongst many other examples, an awful attack outside Edinburgh University Library in December.

There have also been several horrific racist attacks on Asian shopkeepers in different parts of Edinburgh, particularly Niddrie and Moredun in the last year or so.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected those from an ethnic minority background. These attacks have been encouraged by those at the top of society. Last year we had Donald Trump calling Covid-19 the "Chinese Virus". At the same time, some British politicians have blamed British Asians for spreading the virus.

The hostile environment created in the last few years has increased the scapegoating of migrants and refugees. Whilst there is a housing crisis, with joblessness and pay cuts, many of those in positions of power seek to shift the blame onto refugees and migrants. The UK Government and much of the media refer to refugees coming over in small boats from France as an invasion. Yet it was the British Government's bombing of countries like Afghanistan and Iraq that helped cause these refugees to flee, seeking safety and security in Britain, where many of those in Calais have relatives. We have seen refugees in Britain being housed in army barracks recently, in overcrowded conditions and without enough to eat, with the UK Government taking away even the minimal independence that they had. We have to say loud and clear that austerity, unemployment and homelessness have not been caused by migrants.

The hostile environment also saw people from the Windrush generation, who came to Britain as children, being sent to the Caribbean, often to die in destitution. The scandal saw people lose access to work and healthcare. It was a brutal and disgusting example of the effects of racist scapegoating, where people who have lived nearly all their lives in Britain get sent to die in countries they have no connection with. We also have a UK Government and Prime Minister who are Islamophobic. The scapegoating of Muslims has been a common feature of British politics for years. This has encouraged incidents such as the firebombing of the Edinburgh Central Mosque in 2016, and the racially aggravated attempted murder of a Syrian refugee in the Tolcross area in 2018.

These attacks remind us that, unfortunately, Scotland is not immune to racism.

The UK Government has repeatedly tried to portray Muslims as being disloyal and dangerous through the discriminatory use of Prevent. Boris Johnson has described Muslim women who wear the veil as letterboxes.

Item 3.1

Last year, amongst the horrors of the pandemic, we witnessed the inspirational Black Lives Matter protests. The horrific murder of George Floyd galvanised hundreds of thousands in the U.S. and around the world to take a stand against racism. The demonstrations in Britain opened up debate about the brutal history of slavery and racism, as well as about the statues of slave holders and colonialists that are seen in city centres across Britain. In Edinburgh there were, and still are, calls for the statue of Henry Dundas to be removed. As you will be aware, a decision was taken to attach a plaque to the statue.

There were fantastic demonstrations of thousands protesting in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. It has also been brilliant to see footballers Take the Knee, making it clear they are not prepared to put up with racism.

On 20th March, it is vital for anti-racists to highlight our unity in the face of attempts to divide us. We must stand together to face down the threat of racism, and to make it clear that the majority of people find racism abhorrent. Edinburgh Council needs to take a lead, not only in supporting UN Anti-Racism Day, but in challenging racism within the city on a long-term basis.

Steve West

On behalf of Stand Up to Racism Edinburgh

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