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Race on the Agenda

# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

## **Guest Speaker: Lord Victor Adebowale CBE From Stephen Lawrence to Grenfell – 20 years for Race Equality**

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- Thank you for joining us today to celebrate this milestone with us – 20 years of Race on the Agenda. So I'm going to talk for 20 minutes – 1 minute for each year – so you won't have to listen to me witter on for too long. I promise I'll keep to time so we can get on to the reception. Don't want to see you all looking at your watches.

### **Change has not been linear**

- ROTA has spent the last 20 years fighting to bring the issues that impact BAME people into focus – working to reduce online hate speech, researching young girls and gangs and equipping third sector organisations with a comprehensive understanding of the Equality Act. The change has not been linear – we've faced roadblocks, successive governments and I've seen more 'Race' reviews than I've listened to Stevie Wonder albums. But is the arc for Race Equality bending towards justice in the overall? It's hard to say.
- In 2009, 10 years on from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, an Ipsos MORI poll for the Equality and Human Rights Commission showed us a country more at ease with itself than ever before – a nation where nearly half of its citizens were optimistic Britain would be more tolerant in 10 years' time. Back then - 58% of ethnic minorities were optimistic about the future. Would 58% of ethnic minorities say the same today? I doubt it. Now our reality is quite different.
- We fought hard, we won many battles. Scarman, Macpherson, Institutionalised racism, 4 Race Relations Acts, an Equality Act. And samosas, saris and steel bands of course. These achievements are responsible for irrevocable change that have redefined us as a country and inked protections against racial discrimination permanently – we hope - onto the statute books.
- We've seen many symbolic shifts – but without the opinion change we've needed to see. We rejoiced that 70% percent of people said they would be comfortable for their children to choose a partner of a different race or faith in 2009, up from 22% only 7 years before. Britain had reflected and grown-up. If these symbols served as fact of the post-racial society, then

our post-Brexit, Trump-tweeting world epitomises that this was, in fact, illusory. So how did we get here?

- We didn't win hearts and minds. Research by NatCen and the Runnymede Trust this year, found that 1 in 4 people self-define as "very" or a "a little" prejudiced towards people of other races. It has not fallen below this level since 1987, when the question was added to the British Social Attitudes Survey.
- So Jack Straw, commenting in 2013 on the legacy of the racist, unprovoked murder of Stephen Lawrence and Macpherson Inquiry that followed said: "*The pervasive, open racism of the fifties and sixties, the pernicious, sniggering racism of the seventies, eighties and nineties is gone*" – he was overly-optimistic. The tireless campaigning of Doreen Lawrence and the impact of the inquiry changed the way we, as a nation, think about ourselves. But whilst we increased the sanctions for overt racism, we didn't replace the old ways of thinking with new, inclusive ones.
- We can really see this when we look at Brexit and hate crime. Hate crime was steadily decreasing in the 10 years following Macpherson, but increased in 2005 in response to migration from Eastern Europe. Since Brexit, we've seen the largest increase in hate crime since records began. Brexit gave symbolic permission to racists and xenophobes to commit public attacks on and offline. But the sentiments have festered persistently. ROTA's PRISM project that worked with schools to challenge hate speech online is more relevant than ever.
- Without opinion change – we can only tinker around the edges. People and institutions find new, more insidious ways to exert racism and enact their biases. Pernicious racism certainly remains.
- So inequality in labour market has remained. Destructive rhetoric against migrants and refugees has remained. Hate has become more inclusive – with targets of all shades. And nowhere is this seen more keenly than in the criminal justice system.

### **Stephen Lawrence to Lammy Review**

- The disgraceful murder of Stephen Lawrence and the scandalous treatment of the investigation and family by police officers appalled people up and down the country. And the Macpherson inquiry that followed forced a seismic shift that shook the Met. One of its most enduring legacies – the term 'institutional racism' confirmed and legitimised what we had known all along. Finally, we had term that explained how racist ideas and biases become embedded in the institutions meant to serve and protect us. It spawned new HR positions and the monitoring of representation and progression in the public sector.
- But it's a term still not properly understood. Only the police were truly tarred with the term – 'middle class' England – and the institutions so associated with it – the courts, the judiciary, the Civil Service, the BBC – did not have to do the soul searching that the Met were reluctantly forced to do. And ordinary individuals were let 'off the hook': only institutions

and violent thugs were racists now.

- The Inquiry called for stop and search to be effective and fair. It said that increasing trust and confidence must be a ministerial priority. In 1993, when Stephen Lawrence was murdered - a black person was five times more likely to be stopped and searched on the beat.
- Earlier this month, Stopwatch analysis of new data released by the Home Office found Black people are now 8 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. Disproportionality for all BAME groups has increased – now 4 times more likely to be stopped. The numbers of stop and searches have declined for all, but the rate of stops have fallen more for White individuals (at 28%) than BAME individuals (at 11%). Disproportionality is *increasing* even as stops go down.
- As I'm sure we all know, Stop and Search is not effective at reducing violent crime and is *still* not being carried out fairly. As Chair of the National Police Improvement Agency in Stop and Search Community Panel in 2007, I worked to make sure Stop and Search was used proportionately and effectively. Government have the evidence.
- An HM Inspectorate of Constabulary report found that 27 per cent of police records of Stop and Searches did not contain evidence of 'reasonable grounds' for the stop to take place. In 2013, only 9% of stops resulted in an arrest. Research has repeatedly made clear that negative contact with the police erodes trust with BAME communities. So why in 2017 are we still hearing stop and search mooted by Commissioner Cressida Dick and Amber Rudd as a solution to knife crime? We sent a letter in June to both parties hoping to discuss the proposal. We continue to wait for a reply. This, and the funding cut to the Black Police Association is not reassuring BAME communities that our concerns are a priority.
- And disproportionality is a problem endemic to the entire criminal justice system. My independent review into mental health and policing, could not help but expose stereotyped attitudes around race, an increased use of restraint on BAME people, and deaths in custody – despite not featuring in the terms of reference.
- The recent Review by David Lammy also made this clear. Although White, Black and Asian people face similar conviction rates for drug offences, the odds of receiving a prison sentence is 240% higher for BAME groups. Black people are four times more likely to be in prison than white people.
- It's promising that government are committed to implementing Lammy's recommendations as part of the Race Disparity Audit. But if you've been around as long as I have – you become a Veteran of Reviews, commissions and inquiries. As a sector we are cynical and fatigued.

## **Race Disparity Audit**

- Because the inequalities thrown up by the Race Disparity Audit are well-known to all of us here. We already knew that Black Caribbean and Roma, Gypsy and Traveller pupils are more likely to be permanently excluded than White pupils. ROTA's current work on informal exclusions, which are not officially recorded, is showing us how discreet, covert methods are being used to target BAME pupils in particular to avoid overt discrimination.
- And the Audit revealed that Black African, Caribbean and Bangladeshi families are less likely to own their own home – living instead in social or privately rented accommodation. BAME people are more likely to live in non-decent homes, whilst Black African and Pakistani households are more likely to live in a home with damp problems than White British families.
- Research by Professor Danny Dorling adds to this unequal housing landscape – finding BAME people in social housing more likely to live in flats. Black and Asian kids make up the majority of children living above the fourth floor of tower blocks. This hints to direct and indirect discrimination in housing availability and allocation that – when left unchecked can lead to unthinkable tragedy as we've seen at Grenfell Tower.

## **Grenfell**

- The devastating fire has cost at least 80 lives, destroyed livelihoods and traumatised survivors. It has exposed the stark inequality in housing provision in Britain, with BAME groups and migrants bearing the brunt of this injustice. Five months on, almost two-thirds of families are still living in emergency accommodation – stuck in hotels and B&Bs. Families that have lost everything having to face Christmas in temporary accommodation is shameful. In North Kensington GPs have logged more than a thousand Grenfell-related appointments to deal with the mental health needs of those affected. Holding those responsible for this catastrophe to account is vital.
- The social makeup of Grenfell is the product of Race and Class intersecting. As a result, the clear disregard for the safety concerns of residents has a discriminatory outcome. The government is here to serve all of us. But as I mentioned earlier – housing provision is failing BAME people with discrimination and disproportionality rife. This is an unacceptable breach of European Convention of Human Rights protections and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Legislation is an important lever against discrimination – but it has to have teeth and consequences if it's to have any value.

## **Where do we go from here?**

- So where do we go from here? Government departments have started to put together programmes of work to tackle issues raised by the Race Disparity Audit. Employment and school exclusions are a top priority. We remain hopeful that government will take action across the board as promised. Our job will be to continue to hold their feet to the fire.

- We need to see the strengthening of the Equality Act. Clause 1 – the ‘socioeconomic duty’ - must be implemented so that race and class is considered when public services are being provided. The Equality and Human Rights Commission needs adequate funding and powers to hold government to account.
- We need a new, positive vision of what our country is and can be. This must be inclusive, multicultural and not rely on rhetoric that blames and excludes BAME and migrant groups. It must recognise the contribution of all of us to Britain.
- And now no one can hide from the inexcusable inequalities and unfair treatment BAME people have experienced since records began, we need to see targeted programmes to bring these gaps to a close once and for all. Hopefully we won’t have to wait another 20 years to see it happen.