

Brief for Mr. Doudou Diene, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism:

The Effects upon Japanese Canadians of Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia

By Judy Hanazawa, Board Director, National Association of Japanese Canadians and Chair of the NAJC Human Rights Committee

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This written brief for Special Rapporteur Mr. Diene, concerning racism and the Japanese Canadian community is presented as a follow up to the verbal presentation by the National Association of Japanese Canadians on September 17, 2003 during the Montreal Roundtable on Racism and Asians in Canada.

We extend our thanks to Mr. Diene for inviting us to provide information about the Japanese Canadian community.

Our Brief will cover the following areas:

1. History, Demographics and Identity of the Japanese Canadian Community
2. Racism related Issues, challenges, barriers and needs identified by Japanese Canadians
3. Our recommendations
4. Solutions

History and Demographics about the Japanese Canadian Community

Japanese immigration to Canada began 126 years ago. In these years, our community experienced racism, rejection, segregation, social and economic hardship, internment, regrouping, redress and rebuilding. After 1949 and the end of wartime restrictions, Japanese Canadians laboured to get their lives back together. Although many were compelled to put the trauma of the internment behind them, psychological challenges included dealing with the loss of community, cultural identity and language. Many families discouraged children from speaking Japanese so that they would be more 'Canadian' and therefore acceptable to mainstream society. Some Japanese Canadians seem intact not speaking Japanese, not knowing family history, or participating in the community. But this outcome may more indicate responding to historic community and family losses rather than being a personal 'lifestyle' choice.

The Japanese Canadian Redress movement began in 1977 with the 100th Anniversary of the arrival of the first immigrant. Community members, many of whom were third generation, called upon Canada to account for and redress the

internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and to recognize that the internment was a violation of human rights and Canada's democratic principles. After a long and protracted negotiation, Redress was finally achieved on September 22, 1988. The Redress Agreement resulted in the establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, community redevelopment funding, and individual redress payment. Since 1988, there is ongoing focus on community development. It is also important for Japanese Canadians to sustain a political voice which upholds human rights, combats racism and supports others experiencing social injustices .

The demographic picture of Japanese Canadians includes a postwar intermarriage rate of over 90 percent. During the postwar years also, Japanese immigration changed the demographic profile of the community. The current population of the national community numbers 68,000 people approximately. Since 1997 the average immigration rate from Japan is only approximately 1200-1300 per year. Most immigrants are female aged between 25 and 34 sponsored or in international marriages.

Due to the intermarriage rate in both the Canadian born and immigrant population groups, our community is dealing with the special challenges of intermarriage and identifying the needs of biracial and bicultural children. For example, we are aware that some of our children of mixed heritage experience perceptual dissonance – feeling variance between “who you are on the inside and how you appear to others on the outside”. Others, due to the silence within many families about racism and the internment, have stated they have had to work at understanding and claiming their Japanese Canadian history and identity. The needs of Japanese Canadian and other children of mixed heritage should be addressed so that their healthy self esteem and identity will be supported by their family, community and Canadian society in general.

There is a myth of Japanese well-being since it is assumed that Japanese immigrants are well off and middle class people. But social difficulties do exist. There are struggles such as domestic violence, marital difficulties, single parenting, economic hardship, intergenerational conflict, and periodic drug and alcohol abuse issues.

Social issues and service needs also include: addressing the needs of Japanese immigrant women, (including sexual harassment in the workplace and gender exploitation), supporting those needing employment preparation, supporting children and youth who experience racism, providing social connection to overcome isolation, dealing with landlord/tenant difficulties, dealing with discrimination, assisting seniors, and providing information about provincial and federal laws, government and community agency service programs.

At this time, our community is working toward recognizing the common ground between Japanese Canadians and the more recently established immigrant

population so that as a whole, our community can work together on our present and future community development.

Our historic legacy not only documents surviving the effects of hate/bias in day to day life, institutional racism, wartime hysteria, and internment, but also achieving the Redress Agreement with the Canadian government. Our focus following Redress has been on human rights issues and supporting others in their struggle for social justice. This includes expressing our perspective to Canada and others that there IS a place for reparation and financial redress in the process of social justice, and the existence of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement is proof of this. The Canadian government indicates at this time that 'other measures' than granting financial compensation, can redress historical actions. We must state that it is entirely appropriate for those communities who have experienced historic social injustices, economic and other losses to seek financial redress and for Canada to grant them financial compensation would be just and morally correct.

Racism related Issues, challenges, barriers and needs identified by Japanese Canadians

Our community members report that racism is manifested more blatantly when members are new in Canada using English as a second language. Incidents of housing discrimination were cited, with landlords demanding higher rents from community members than others, and unfairly blaming tenants for damages. Incidents of racism intersecting with discrimination due to language difficulty include being ignored by service providers, being sworn at and talked about disparagingly in French by storeclerks and other public service providers. Some incidences indicate that the discrimination is not due to the person's Japanese descent, but rather a response to the person's Asian appearance, indicating that Asian people in general, continue to face racial discrimination in Canada. Other instances include sexual harassment of Japanese speaking women in the workplace who are victimized by racist attitudes and denigrating stereotyped thinking about the availability and submissiveness of Japanese and other Asian women in general. Over the last 2 years, there have also been alarming random incidences of violent, criminal attacks against young Asian women students. Local community organizations facilitated safety workshops for Japanese speaking students for this reason. Periodically also, community members report incidences about racial slurs, derogatory remarks and other negative incidences at school experienced by their elementary and high school children.

Japanese Canadians, due to our own history of wartime internment, have serious concerns as well, about racial profiling and unjust treatment resulting from 'wartime' hysteria. Although current concerns relate to the 'war on terrorism', we are familiar with the connection between racialized thinking, and fear and mistrust against those perceived as the 'enemy'. We have concerns about Canada's Antiterrorism Act for these reasons.

Our recommendations

- Governments at the federal and provincial levels must support and facilitate programming to foster intercultural AND antiracism education, particularly concerning groups subjected to racial profiling such as Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, Asians, etc.
- Governments must also support public education systems, to proactively and actively discourage discriminatory practices, bias/hate crimes, and discrimination directed at those who are a members of a high profile racialized group at this time, members of other minorities, immigrants, persons of colour, and persons using English as a second language;
- Governments and community based services must ensure that all public education and other support programs address the intersecting hardships experienced by those who are immigrants, persons of colour, female, and speak English as a second language.
- Public monitoring of the implementation of the Antiterrorism Act to ensure racialized groups are not being targeted by police and other authorities;
- Ensure government landlord and tenant and all public housing services address racism concerns, making sure avenues to address discrimination for those with English as a second language are well publicized, translated into other languages, and readily available. Also, translated information must be readily available for tenants AND landlords about human rights law prohibiting housing and racial discrimination and providing information about steps to address violations;
- Public strategizing between government, authorities, service providers and community to review cases of violence against women of colour such as Asian students, to determine whether these are hate crimes;
- Address continuing incidents about harassment against Asian women in the workplace by having government, union and other relevant groups establish and monitor workplace education and prevention programs about sexual harassment and racial discrimination and developing and implementing mentorship and support programs for immigrant female employees;
- Ensure the Cultural Diversity task force of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters be accountable to present a fair, unstereotyped and accurate representation in the media of Asian Canadians, and Asian women;

- Ensure also that the Canadian Association of Broadcasters generate more exposure for Asians in the media because generally speaking, Asians are considered either perpetual foreigners, not to be trusted, not born in Canada, not a part of Canadian society, or are altogether invisible and not present when depictions of the Canadian public are presented.
- Governments and the community must support seniors service agencies to deliver advocacy and support programs for seniors of diverse cultures, who use English as a second language;
- Public and community based programs should address the issue of needs of biracial, bicultural children and the special challenges of interracial marriage;
- That community groups be mutually supportive and address the issue of redress, reparation and financial compensation for historic injustices so that a united and cohesive approach can be developed and established in dealings with government.

Solutions

We ask the Special Rapporteur after reviewing issues and concerns, to gain commitment from both government AND community groups to address racism against Asians in Canada. We recommend establishing a system of local, regional and national joint intercommunity/ government monitoring committees, which will assume authority to:

- review and recommend programs and services in response to racism concerns;
- advise service providers and funders about priorities and areas where program and service needs exist;
- authorize and endorse needed programs and services
- monitor the effectiveness of programs
- support services which are educational, proactive, preventive as well as services which respond to needs of those directly affected by racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia;
- work with the media in the area of preventive public education about racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia
- set up regular scheduled reviews for determining service effectiveness and follow through;
- support communities who are seeking redress for historic injustices;
- set up a future major review with the Special Rapporteur

