

RACISM

SERIES: TAKING A STAND

EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF POSITION

Racism is the belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristics determined by hereditary factors and that this endows some races with an intrinsic superiority over others. 'Racism' also refers to political or social programmes built on that belief. The use of the term 'race' itself is contested, but is generally used to refer to a distinct group sharing a common ethnicity, national origin, descent and/or skin colour. The Salvation Army denounces racism in all forms.

Racism is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God and are equal in value. The Salvation Army believes that the world is enriched by a diversity of cultures and ethnicities.

The Salvation Army firmly believes that racism is contrary to God's intention for humankind, and yet we recognise that the tendency for racism is present in all people and all societies. Racial discrimination can take many expressions, including tribalism, casteism and ethnocentrism. Racism is not only the result of individual attitudes, but can also be perpetuated by social structures and systems. Sometimes racism is overt and intentional, but often it is not.

While many Salvationists have acted firmly and courageously against racism, The Salvation Army acknowledges with regret, that Salvationists have sometimes shared in the sins of racism and conformed to economic, organisational and social pressures that perpetuate racism. The Salvation Army is committed to fight against racism wherever it is experienced and will speak into societies around the world wherever we encounter it.

As we pray for God's will to be done on earth as in Heaven,
The Salvation Army will work towards a world where all
people are accepted, loved and valued.

Download the complete IPS on Racism at salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips

RACISM, casteism and tribalism are global issues. This is a tragic part of the human story and can be described as 'racial prejudice plus power'. According to this definition, two elements are required in order for racism to exist: racial prejudice, and 'social power to codify and enforce this prejudice into an entire society' (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prejudice_plus_power).

The problem of racism is pervasive, complex and subtle. It can be embedded in institutional life, evident to the recipients yet hidden to the perpetrators. However, racism can also be overt, systematic and cruel, as epitomised by the slave trade, the Holocaust and apartheid.

The category of 'race' has no scientific basis and is a social construction. Scripture, rather, refers to people groups and nations with ethnicity expressed through language, culture and geographic boundaries.

The only race is the human one.

THE HUMAN RACE

Humans are all created in the image and likeness of God, with the 'breath of God' in us (Genesis 1:27; 2:7).

Indeed, the Bible emphasises that all humans share one blood (Acts 17:26). Amid multi-ethnic, multicultural and multireligious

FOR REFLECTION

- * What are your experiences or observations of racism, as recipient or perpetrator, unintentional or otherwise?
- * Discuss the statement 'The only race is the human one'.
- * What are some specific ideas and initiatives your corps can embrace to combat racial inequality?

Athens, Paul acknowledges cultural diversity, asserts the unity of the human race and points to the consummation of both in Christ.

This is well illustrated with the image of the destruction of the 'dividing wall of hostility', where Jew and Gentile now become one in Christ (Ephesians 2:14).

At the heart of racism is our sheer human fallenness. Rather than seeing the spiritual image of God in each other we are drawn to an idolised physical image.

It is a short line to racial pride, the belief that people with specific physical features are inherently superior to people with different physical features.

The matter is especially complex when intertwined with the story of the people of Israel, the ethnicity central to the salvation story.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Beginning with the people known as Hebrews, God's 'treasured possession' (for example in Psalm 135:4), to the fact that Jesus was born and crucified as a Jew, Scripture records the unique and special role embodied by the people of Israel.

God choosing to act in history includes the reality that Hebrew culture is forever intertwined with the salvation story.

We can see how this election could be misinterpreted as a divine affirmation of ethnic superiority. This includes people lamentably self-identifying as the 'new Israel' to sanction racist ideology – such as the slave trade and apartheid.

The Jewish-Gentile relationship is present in the Abrahamic covenant where God says: 'All peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:3). Jesus' gracious relationship with differing ethnicities is exemplified in his conversations with the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman.

He commissions his followers to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19) and promises the Holy Spirit will enable them to be 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

This is powerfully reinforced with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when 15 distinct ethnicities simultaneously hear the wonders of God in their native tongue (Acts 2:1-11).

The tension between Jews and Gentiles is a major theme in the New Testament Church. Paul, Barnabas and Peter have to convince the Jerusalem Council of the validity of Gentile converts (Acts 15:1-21). They prevail, leading to one of the most significant decisions in all of Scripture.

A deep biblical principle emerges: Jews do not cease to be Jews; Gentiles do not cease to be Gentiles. Ethnic differences, however, are to be no barrier to fellowship in Christ.

The template is set for resolution – a multi-ethnic vision of the Kingdom of Heaven.

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

The scattering of the nations (Genesis 11) followed by the

Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12) begin a theme that permeates Scripture – the global, multi-ethnic reconciliation plan of God.

It is quite certain that in a mysterious way we shall retain our ethnic identities in Heaven. In Revelation, John 'sees' a multitude 'from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne' (Revelation 7:9).

This is the consummation of history and provides a model for us to strive towards now – one that is sharply distinct. Followers of Jesus Christ find essential unity in him, rather than in culture and ethnicity.

Such a way of thinking and relating is a powerful countercultural force for good.

SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Racism affects everyone and devastates a country and culture. It negatively affects every area of life, including community stability, housing, education, health care and voting rights. Ultimately, the collective contribution of every citizen is compromised.

It is incumbent on the currently empowered generations, who did not commit or create the racist cultures of their forebears, to assess the present culture and work towards just and equal communities.

OUR STATEMENT

In the International Positional Statement on Racism, The Salvation Army promises to 'work towards a world where all people are accepted, loved and valued', and to speak against racism 'wherever we encounter it'.





**LIEUT-COLONEL
ALFRED BANDA**
Chief Secretary
Malawi Territory

» PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM LIEUT-COLONEL ALFRED BANDA

Racism on the soils of Africa

Racism in Africa goes back many centuries and is one of the evils the continent still struggles with today. Although racism existed beforehand, it reached its peak through European colonialists during the dividing of the African continent.

While different groups of African people exhibited racism through internal conflicts and tribal warfare, it was colonialism that divided Africans on a grand scale and contributed much to civil wars, hunger, the spread of disease and unstable governments.

Today, countries are divided based on their ancient tribal and racial differences.

Apartheid in South Africa

South African apartheid or segregation was enforced through legislation by the National Party at that time. Since its inception, both black and white people have suffered its consequences. The rights, associations and movements of the majority black inhabitants and other ethnic groups were curtailed, and white minority rule was exercised.

Racism in Sudan

Racist tension exists between black Africans and their Arab counterparts in this country. Arabs captured Sudanese black men during the civil war and they were either killed or enslaved. The captors also raped women prisoners, claiming that Islamic law permitted them to do so. In 2002, the government of Sudan was accused of genocide. Two million people were killed and four

million more were displaced due to civil war.

Land seizures in Zimbabwe

In recent years there has been sanctioned violence against white Zimbabweans, particularly farmers, who have been forcefully evicted from their land. Some lost their properties, with some suffering injuries and even being killed.

Racism against Indians in Uganda

This country has many citizens of Asian origin, originally brought in for clerical services during colonial rule. When Uganda gained independence, a new system of work permits and trade licences was introduced which was discriminatory to Ugandans of Asian origin.

Tribal conflicts in many parts of Africa

There are ongoing conflicts between tribes in Africa for many reasons, including water access, grazing land rights and political differences. This cannot be underestimated as shown in the example of Rwanda, where long-standing unrest eventually exploded into full-blown genocide in 1994.

Extended community value

One of the characteristics of African people is the strong value for extended family and community. African people thrive in profoundly sharing life, resources, joys and sorrows. In so doing, the resulting peace, love and strength in these close relationships binds them together.

We believe, this strength will prevail.



DR JAMES E. READ
Executive Director
The Salvation Army
Ethics Centre, Winnipeg
Canada and Bermuda Territory
Chair of the International Moral and
Social Issues Council, IHQ

PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM DR JAMES E. READ

The Past Is Never Dead

The most persistent racism in Canada has roots that are 500 years old. Nowadays, Canada's indigenous peoples – First Nations (long-called 'Indians'), Inuit (once-called 'Eskimos') and Métis – make up about five per cent of the total population. They are over-represented in prisons and among the poor. A shocking number of indigenous children are 'in care'.

These social ills cry out for solution. Yet, even describing them as 'indigenous issues' risks perpetuating racial stereotyping.

In the 16th century, Europeans began to explore what they called the 'New World'. They claimed sovereignty over whatever they found, despite the fact that people had lived across this territory for thousands of years.

In the British colonies in North America, all land became property of the Crown. This meant indigenous peoples were forced to accept the decisions of a British monarch concerning what land they could claim. When Canada graduated from colonial status three centuries later, the new country retained this old law.

By government decision, the territories reserved for indigenous peoples were often remote. Modern infrastructure and commerce passed them by. Subsequently the Canadian government decided that all indigenous children should go to school – to be 'civilised'. They were taken (by force, if necessary)



**COLONEL
RICHARD MUNN**
Territorial Secretary for Theology
and Christian Ethics
USA Eastern Territory

to 'Indian Residential Schools' (IRS). As the name implies, these were racially segregated boarding schools. A survivor remembers: 'Father sat us down, and told us that this Indian agent came to tell us... that we had to go to school, to a boarding school, one that is not close to our home...' (*The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015). Fathers were told that they would be jailed if they did not send their children away to school.

This practice persisted for more than a century. Often it was churches that ran the IRSs. Shamefully the gospel was betrayed by the physical, social, psychological and sexual abuse of thousands of children. Eventually, survivors of the IRS system won an apology from the government following the final report of a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission's findings called the IRS policy 'cultural genocide'.

Canada lives with this legacy in the 21st century. And it needs to.

For its part, The Salvation Army is trying to learn and acknowledge the truth. A large percentage of our beneficiaries are indigenous, yet racism lives in the Army. Sometimes it's hard to admit but, without truth, what future can there be?

Faults need to be amended. We need to become recipients and agents of reconciliation. Change will be arduous. Hopeful signs? One is the resourcing of Indigenous Ministries in our territory under the leadership of Major Shari Russell, herself an indigenous Canadian.

PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM COLONEL RICHARD MUNN

Hidden Biases

I lived in the Belgian Congo (today called the Democratic Republic of the Congo) until I was 10 years of age, and was imprinted forever as a white child in the pulsating Congolese throng of the Leopoldville Central Corps and, then again, in the multi-ethnic American School of Leopoldville. Even our Army compound resembled the League of Nations (predecessor to the United Nations).

What a wonderful start to life! As such, I have sometimes naively assumed an immunity to racism.

However, what is not included in the idyllic description above is the truth that I also took great pride in the British Empire, and inwardly glowed at the map of the world with the many, fortunate, countries coloured crimson red, a sign of empire domination.

There is an intriguing subtlety in play. Despite our genuine ideological and faith commitments, we are all susceptible to racial prejudice. The issue seems stamped within us. We can fuel it, loose it or exercise self-control.

For instance, our THQ community in multi-ethnic New York recently hosted a diversity training seminar. We interacted with the Harvard Implicit Bias Test, a well-respected tool that measures our internal, unseen biases. The presenter, a highly educated African American man, had taken the test himself and discovered to genuine surprise his own hidden and implicit bias. Even

he leaned towards a preference for white males in roles and positions of authority.

In the USA these days, there are significant and painful racial tensions in this nation of immigrants. They may be epitomised in the long-standing black-white tensions, but these are now widening to include the entire ethnic spectrum of immigrant and refugee influx.

Any idealised notion that the legislative civil rights progress, secured at great cost a generation ago, is permanent, appears sadly naive; a reminder that racism must be consistently countered, personally, corporately and nationally.

As a Salvationist in a richly multi-ethnic Army, I am determined to embody the essence of our International Positional Statement and exert every influence I can towards empowering others for a world that is 'enriched by a diversity of cultures and ethnicities'.