

# Racism

## Racial Prejudice

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Racism

# Human Race

All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity.

(UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice 1978)

# One human family

*The second teaching of Bahá'u'lláh concerns the unity of mankind. All are the servants of God and members of one human family. God has created all, and all are His children. He rears, nourishes, provides for and is kind to all. Why should we be unjust and unkind?*

# Racial Discrimination

The term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

(UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965)

# Racism

Racism is discrimination and prejudice against people based on their race or ethnicity. Racism can be present in social actions, practices, or political systems that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practices. The ideology underlying racist practices often assumes that humans can be subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as inferior or superior.

# Science of Racism

Racism is any detectable difference in treatment of otherwise identical people based on race.

Racism is prejudice plus power, based on a system of advantages.

In hiring, a name with racial associations is rejected.

An implicit bias test, associating words “good”, “bad” with “white”, “black people”.

People construct excuses to say their behaviour is not racist.

# Types of Racism

- Explicit racism
- Unconscious bias like a threat response
- Insidious racism of paternalistically lowering expectations
- Aversive racism hiding behind an excuse
- Definitional boundaries of discrimination with flexible definitions or bending the rules to refuse to acknowledge racist behaviour

(Amarachi Orie interview with Keon West, *New Scientist*, 1 February 2025, pp.38-41)

# Structural Racism

Structural or systemic racism, where the system continues to function to produce racist outcomes:

- things that stop people of colour from having power
- police “stop and search”
- most people in government, police, bankers, judges, CEOs are still white
- behaviour seems natural as part of the system
- colonial and racist extermination of natives, Jews
- fight for power



# Changing Racism

To change personal racism:

- spend time with them, talk to them
- buy books written by them
- watch television programmes they made
- immerse yourself in their lives
- learn their emotions, what they care about

We must change people's minds, as well as the system

(Amarachi Orié interview with Keon West, *New Scientist*, 1 February 2025, pp.38-41)



Colombia

# Prejudice

*Bahá'u'lláh also taught that prejudices—whether religious, racial, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundations of human development. Prejudices of any kind are the destroyers of human happiness and welfare. Until they are dispelled, the advancement of the world of humanity is not possible; yet racial, religious and national biases are observed everywhere.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), §63, p.181)*

# Prejudice

*For thousands of years the world of humanity has been agitated and disturbed by prejudices. As long as it prevails, warfare, animosity and hatred will continue. Therefore, if we seek to establish peace, we must cast aside this obstacle; for otherwise, agreement and composure are not to be attained.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, §63, p.181)*

# Prejudice

*The causes of dispute among different nations are always due to one of the following classes of prejudice: racial, lingual, theological, personal, and prejudices of custom and tradition. It requires a universal active force to overcome these differences.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, prejudice)*



# The Three False Gods

The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshipping.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 113)

# Three False Gods

The theories and policies, so unsound, so pernicious, which deify the state and exalt the nation above mankind, which seek to subordinate the sister races of the world to one single race, which discriminate between the black and the white, and which tolerate the dominance of one privileged class over all others -- these are the dark, the false, and crooked doctrines for which any man or people who believes in them, or acts upon them, must, sooner or later, incur the wrath and chastisement of God.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 113)

# Fighting Racism

A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39)



# Racism

Let them, while each is attempting to contribute its share to the solution of this perplexing problem, call to mind the warnings of Abdu'l-Bahá, and visualize, while there is yet time, the dire consequences that must follow if this challenging and unhappy situation that faces the entire American nation is not definitely remedied.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39)

# Combating Racism

Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39)

# Combating Racism

Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds. Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39)

# Combating Racism

Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country. Let them rather believe, and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained cooperation, must depend, more than on any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith, the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfillment of that country's glorious destiny.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39)

# Overcoming Racism

Racism is perpetuated and thrives when populations operate in social contexts in which they merely live side by side without opportunities for meaningful interaction.

*(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections on the implementation of action plans against racism: Fostering social cohesion at the grassroots, Brussels Office, 2023)*

# Overcoming Racism

An irreplaceable component of any strategy to overcome racism requires giving attention to the broader dynamics of community life in neighbourhoods.

*(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections on the implementation of action plans against racism: Fostering social cohesion at the grassroots, Brussels Office, 2023)*

# Overcoming Racism

Within neighbourhoods, individuals from various backgrounds need opportunities to come together to define and engage in shared projects that contribute to its moral, intellectual and material wellbeing. In sum, residents of a neighbourhood or village nurture a sense of belonging and build up the resolve to eradicate prejudice when they are able to cooperate, contribute and become protagonists in their local reality.

*(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections on the implementation of action plans against racism: Fostering social cohesion at the grassroots, Brussels Office, 2023)*

# Overcoming Racism

It is through such co-participation that diverse perspectives are encountered, meaningful bonds are forged, and the dignity and capabilities inherent to all are made manifest. In parallel, residents become more conscious of the lived experiences of discrimination that their neighbours face.

*(Bahá'í International Community, Reflections on the implementation of action plans against racism: Fostering social cohesion at the grassroots, Brussels Office, 2023)*



# Overcoming Racism

Diverse perspectives, practices, languages and cultures should be considered a source of strength that a community can learn to harness, rather than a deficit that needs to be addressed or a challenge to be managed from above.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Reflections on the implementation of action plans against racism: Fostering social cohesion at the grassroots*, Brussels Office, 2023)

# Racial Harmony

*The world of humanity is like a garden and the various races are the flowers which constitute its adornment and decoration. In the animal kingdom also we find variety of color.*

*Throughout the animal kingdom we do not find the creatures separated because of color. They recognize unity of species and oneness of kind. If we do not find color distinction drawn in a kingdom of lower intelligence and reason, how can it be justified among human beings, especially when we know that all have come from the same source and belong to the same household?*

# Racial Harmony

*In the estimation of God there is no distinction of color; all are one in the color and beauty of servitude to Him. Color is not important; the heart is all-important. It matters not what the exterior may be if the heart be pure and white within. God does not behold differences of hue and complexion; He looks at the hearts. He whose morals and virtues are praiseworthy is preferred in the presence of God; he who is devoted to the Kingdom is most beloved.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 23-24)

# Racial Harmony

*...both white and colored people have gathered here and I hope the time will come when they shall live together in the utmost peace, unity and friendship.*

*May both develop toward the highest degree of equality and altruism. May you be drawn together in friendship and may extraordinary development make brotherhood a reality and truth.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 23-24)*

Louis and Louisa  
Gregory

1912



# Racial Harmony

*Therefore strive earnestly and put forth your greatest endeavor toward the accomplishment of this fellowship and the cementing of this bond of brotherhood between you. Such an attainment is not possible without will and effort on the part of each; from one, expressions of gratitude and appreciation; from the other kindliness and recognition of equality. Each one should endeavor to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement. This is possible only by conjoining of effort and inclination.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, [Foundations of World Unity](#), p. 23-24)*

# Racial Harmony

*Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind. For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and whites will be an assurance of the world's peace. Then racial prejudice, national prejudice, limited patriotism and religious bias will pass away and remain no longer.*

*(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 23-24)*