



Tackling Race Inequalities: A Discussion Document

A joint response from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church are grateful for this opportunity to respond to this consultation concerning the strategy on tackling race inequalities. There are some 150,000 members of Baptist churches associated with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The Methodist Church has about 295,000 members and 800,000 people are connected with the Church. The United Reformed Church comprises about 150,000 adults and 100,000 children. The three denominations are the largest of the Free Churches in Britain and are developing increasingly close relationships both locally and nationally. A considerable number of our congregations, especially in the larger cities, are ethnically diverse, and the churches have long struggled with, and preached against, racial inequality.

The churches are grateful that the government is committed to tackling the complex issues associated with the many interfaces between the diverse cultures within the UK today. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this consultation, because the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) members of our churches are acutely conscious of racial inequalities and prejudice, both outside our church institutions and also, regrettably, sometimes inside.

SECTION 6: MOVING THE APPROACH TO RACE EQUALITY ONWARDS

How can we make sure that race equality maintains a distinct profile within a wider programme of work to address multiple disadvantage?

The churches are committed to working with the Government towards eradicating racial inequalities. We do not consider, however, that improving service provision in education, the labour market, criminal justice system (CJS), housing and health, will eradicate the underlying racism in society. We are all compromised by the historical layered inequalities which detrimentally influence social cohesion and we are grateful that the Government is pursuing this problem from all angles. We completely agree that the solutions to racial inequality will arise from multiple inter-sector, and inter-area approaches (ref page 5). We appreciate that some BAME people experience one or more categories of inequality, and that uniting these under the combined remit of the Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission increases the efficiency of service provision.

The churches call on the Government to maintain a high-profile awareness campaign to *eradicate structural racism* within British society.

Racism is endemic in British society. We believe that it will not be eradicated until the false constructs, based upon arbitrary aspects of genetic difference, and uninformed fears around 'otherness', are dissolved within our communities. False stereotypes must be recognised and exposed for what they are – symptoms of unjust power relations, which reinforce White privilege.

Which are the priority areas for Government action on race equality? What responsibilities are there for people from all communities in modern Britain, to others and themselves?

We strongly believe that change has to occur on two major levels if racial inequality is to be eradicated.

Firstly, much effort continues, rightly, to be invested in assisting people in the BAME communities to find a secure, fulfilled life in Britain, by focusing on the five major service areas, namely, education, the labour market, CJS, housing and health. We applaud the efforts of the government in tackling these issues thus far, but there is much yet to be done.

Secondly, a deeper level of change must take place, which principally involves tackling the *cultural consciousness* of the White British people. The fight against racial inequality requires nothing less than transforming the national ethos, which continues to result in White privilege. This historical social scar on British life is now joined by other ‘racisms’, associated with the complex relations between various cultural groups, but that is no reason to avoid drawing attention to the racist legacy of British Imperialism. Racism is an everyday part of life for the majority of BAME people in our society, especially in the poorer social groupings. *Eradicating this injustice must be the work of government and people together.*

We suggest that there should be a national focus on universal membership of the ‘human race’. We envision a national ground swell, based on the cultural precept of *ubuntu*, proclaimed by Bishop Desmond Tutu during the Apartheid era, namely, “I am human because you are human”.

Quality public service provision is essential and will assist many individuals and increase their well-being. Some of the invidious ‘cracks’ of inequality in our national life, however, will persist, because inequalities of access to quality services are but symptoms of underlying ill health. Until a deeper wave of change happens, the endemic disease of racism will continue to break out in the playground, in the workplace, in our institutions, in the hidden corners of our cities and in our lanes. More lives will be tarnished, leading to the continuous re-infection of the social body. It needs to be faced and dealt with, through creative interaction between cultural groupings, and through respect and tolerance fostered through education.

How should a race equality strategy focus on addressing disadvantage linked with race and ethnicity, as opposed to mainstream programmes?

One of the difficulties of talking/writing about BAME people, though they may be identifiable as Black, South Asian, Chinese, Gypsies and Irish travellers, etc, is the danger of totalising any given ethnic group, and under-stating the existence of *intra-racial inequality*. In terms of economics and socio-economic mobility, it is important to question why some Black Africans do better at education than African Caribbean and why some Indian, Korean, and Chinese Asians surpass all the others (including white people) educationally and economically. This is noted on page 20 – not all communities are in the same position. *There is more work that needs to be done to map this trend and the reasons as to why the others remain deprived. Any study of racial inequality must be cognisant of class, caste and social standing dynamics within the BAME constituencies.* In our view, these related class issues, which apply across the whole of British society, are not given sufficient attention in the consultation document.

Given that the majority of prison inmates will come from, and return to, disadvantaged and minority communities, we would want to inquire, “To what extent and in what ways do the high rates of imprisonment weaken already fragile neighbourhoods?” At one level the experience of imprisonment is largely an individual and family matter. Yet, the reality is that communities must support increasing numbers of economically and socially impaired men, women, and children. That burden might exacerbate existing strains within the community, such as unemployment and crime. The increased rates of imprisonment of BAME people have a ripple effect throughout the society, well beyond the inmates' neighbourhoods. A major effect is to exacerbate racial tensions and perpetuate racial inequality. Dominant social opinion too readily defines minority neighbourhoods in terms of gun and knife crimes, terrorists, and welfare, whereas BAME citizens increasingly point to the "White establishment."

Can we disentangle the role that race and ethnicity plays in driving disadvantage from other factors, eg. socio-economic status?

We recognise the problems associated in distinguishing racial disadvantage from ambient socio-economic conditions. We suggest that ethnicity and deprivation are closely interrelated, and that it is often impossible to make clear-cut distinctions. Whilst conceding that reducing deprivation can go some way to increasing the confidence of BAME people, very often racial prejudice can be clearly distinguished from general social pressures.

For example, in Section 3 of the consultation paper, there is a reference to early migrants entering low paid employment, which still applies to many people today. Attention is drawn to a report (November 2006) from Queen Mary College London, *Multiculturalism at work: the experience of Ghanaians in London*, which indicates that racism continues to slow the progress of individuals in the work place, even when people are well qualified and experienced in their field. This report highlights both overt racist remarks, and more subtle implicit racism, which foment frustration and anger.

These accumulative 'pin-pricks' of racial abuse are extremely common, and lead people to develop coping strategies within an ethnic community. Damaged people often buttress their cultural identity by acts of resistance to White society. *Multiculturalism at Work* explains that some people draw on their religion and ethnic associations. Women, in particular, often generate a determination to succeed *against the odds*. One Ghanaian Baptist woman pastor, on hearing about this consultation, reported that she advised her daughters "to try and rise above the racist onslaught", and "not to assume that every problem was associated with skin colour, but sometimes, that is the only explanation". This backdrop to life, even to highly professional careers, is not without human cost. Racist disadvantage in employment opportunities, generates feelings of ambivalence towards life in Britain, and places (White) British society in a negative light.

An articulate and highly educated Ghanaian minister, who very recently acquired British citizenship, referred to his personal experience, in response to this consultation. He spoke of how his expectations of Britain had been revised

downwards on arrival here. He was particularly aghast to see homeless White people on the streets. He expected higher standards of humanitarian concern. Now married to a White British woman, the couple frequently attract unsolicited racist taunts when travelling together on London public transport. On marrying, the woman exchanged her second name for her partner's African family name. As a result, she has experienced the derogation associated with racism. One of her university lecturers advised her that she had made a serious mistake in changing her name, because she was now much less likely to get a job on graduation.

Another African minister, with permanent leave to remain in the UK, is now studying for his PhD. He related his irritation when some people ask him, "How come you speak such good English?"

A White British couple visited a church for the first time. The worship was led by a local (lay) preacher, who was Black. After the service, a White member of the congregation spoke to the couple to 'reassure' them that the regular minister was a "nice white man". The couple did not return to worship there.

These stories show people being ascribed negative social status. They are not accorded the same standing as a White professional with equivalent educational attainment. Those who live with personal experience of discrimination have no difficulty in *identifying* racism, although they may have a problem *proving* it, in a climate in which they are disempowered.

It is probably also worth mentioning at this point that wider policies can shape the consciousness of ethnic groups. For some Muslim sections of British society, British foreign policy is arguably considered to demonstrate racial and religious discrimination. Immigrant communities are often aware of UK policy in relation to their own countries.

It is vital that the Government explores how to divorce the unproductive relationship between race and immigration, something which is capitalised on by political extremist groups, and does not assist progress on either issue. The Government cannot afford to be oblivious to the increased 'rage' resulting from White marginalization either. Tensions will increase further, if Government disengages

from this concern, which will inevitably lead to growing support for far right political parties.

We wonder how the Government interprets the meaning of the word, “fairness”, as applied on page 8 of the consultation report. Is “fairness” about challenging class and providing a level playing field for all? Is “fairness” about allowing room for positive discrimination?

What practical measures should we be taking to address disadvantages experienced by different Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups?

We would suggest that increased empowerment will be the core factor in overcoming racially constructed disadvantage. The antidote to race inequalities lies in providing more access to opportunities: training, education and recognition of individual skills and potential. Ethnic communities and groups should be intentionally targeted, including working together with the relevant faith groups.

Very often, young people, from both White and BAME origins lack self-esteem and confident identities because they are growing up without strong role models. Churches can and do contribute to community mentoring schemes, where one-to-one attention and support create alternative futures for vulnerable young people.

People need to be actively encouraged to take the time to get to know their neighbours, and to be open to learning from each other. Much has already been done in schools to educate children in appreciating the differences between cultures and celebrating each other’s roots. Both the Government and the voluntary sector should champion encounters between different groups of people, which will reduce the fears associated with difference.

How can government strategies to address social mobility for all also address the effects of historic and residual racism?

Is there a need for a separate strategy to tackle race inequality? If so, what should the priorities be?

Should we expand our policy areas? If we do, do we risk diluting the focus on the five public service areas mentioned above?

SECTION 7: ACTIONS NEEDED AT LOCAL LEVEL

How can we help and encourage the public sector, such as local councils, criminal justice agencies and NHS Trusts to prioritise their work on race equality?

What role does the voluntary and community sector have to play in prioritising race equality at the local level?

Many churches are engaged in working within immigrant communities. There are examples of language classes, very many parents and toddler groups, and practical support in urban areas.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain together with the Street Pastors' organisation has organised "Bite the Bullet", which involves listening to the mainly black young people who are concerned about gun and knife crime, and working with them to identify solutions. The charity, Action for Children, which has Methodist origins, has also focused on this issue, in their project, "Step inside our Shoes". These initiatives collaborate closely with the police and other statutory agencies.

The Black-majority/Black-led churches are particularly active in projects which assist in reversing the pattern of underachievement amongst Black boys.

The BAME respondents to this consultation within our churches were quick to point out that White teenagers in London are often more vulnerable than BAME teenagers to sliding into antisocial behaviours. These BAME respondents were anxious to call on the government to focus on poorer white communities, and to listen and to act on their concerns. Whilst the data in Section 4, "Britain today: greater cultural diversity", was thought to be useful, it was also interpreted as potentially divisive fodder for the politically extremist right wing, such as the BNP. Government must seek to address the disenfranchisement felt by the working class within British white society.

SECTION 8: PROMOTING RACE EQUALITY THROUGH A RANGE OF MECHANISMS

How can we focus more effectively on ensuring that mainstream policies meet the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups?

Section 8 of the consultation report maps out some very worthwhile initiatives, demonstrating intentional effort, whilst focusing on promoting race equality. There is a need to examine why, in spite of the growing numbers of capable and skilled BAME individuals, civic participation and representation of BAME groups is still well below what it should be.

This raises the question as to whether ensuring educational and employment opportunities and moving people out of deprivation, will ever eradicate discrimination and the marginalisation of BAME people.

Race Equality must strive to make connections across all areas of inequalities – as we work towards the common good for all. Making connections on the matter of racial inequality is not necessarily about attempting to equate the experiences of different cultures, but helping all to realise and make connections, in order to become more aware. This will enable people to work on a common front, in order to take on the structural issues. It also avoids the ‘ghettoisation’ both of issues and of advocacy. Whilst making these connections, individuals would speak from their own background and experience, contributing from their distinctive cultural profiles. There is an urgent need to train and support skilled community enablers, and especially the people who are delivering programmes. These people cannot be myopic, or they actually aggravate the issues.

How best can we work with the private sector to address ethnic minority employment issues?

The black young adults who spoke on behalf of their generation at the launch of the Action for Children, “Step inside Our Shoes”, spoke eloquently about the need for work experience placements, apprenticeships and other employment opportunities. They highlighted the need for encouragement, and lamented the wastage which

occurs when young people have gained qualifications, but do not have the 'cultural capital' to perform favourably at interviews. The private sector could assist in this urgent concern, but the economic downturn will inevitably augur against positive selective discrimination.

How can we encourage more people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds to get involved in public life and in volunteering?

All people need to be actively encouraged to take the time to get to know their neighbours, and to be open to learning from each other. Much has already been done in schools to educate children in appreciating the differences between cultures and celebrating each other's roots. Both the Government and the voluntary sector should champion encounters between different groups of people. Once people have been damaged by racism, they tend to withdraw into the safe company of their own community, rather than risking further engagement.

Many Black members of churches within Baptist Union of Great Britain have recently experienced a considerable rise in their sense of inclusion and wellbeing within the life of the Union. This resulted from a formal apology for historical engagement in the slave trade, which was unanimously agreed by the Baptist Union Council in November 2007. (See Appendix A for the text.) This public acknowledgement of racial injustice has changed the hearts and minds of many White Baptists, and given Black Baptists confidence to emerge into leadership. This model of social liberation depends on a sense of shared genuine regret for racial discrimination.

What are the main barriers to civic participation and representation that need to be addressed?

Perhaps BAME under-representation in civic participation will recede, as educational opportunities increase, and more role models take their place in public life. At the same time, however, vigorous efforts must be directed at unmasking institutional discrimination/racism and the role of power with its gate-keeping capacity to exclude people from coming forward as candidates in public life. There is an urgent need for more intentional work in enabling BAME people to realise a vocation in civic engagement.

SECTION 9: GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE STRATEGY

What more can the Government do to help communities recognise and celebrate the strengths that come from diversity and the values we have in common?

What should the Government be doing to ensure that the gains in Black, Asian and minority ethnic employment, and the narrowing of the employment gap are not reversed during a recession?

How do we ensure that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities have the skills to fully participate in the post downturn economy?

How can we ensure that our approach meets the needs of the different regions, and Scotland and Wales?

How can we best work with organisations such as Regional Development Agencies, Government Offices and local authorities to deliver on race equality?

Do you agree with the approach of a long-term vision and a short-term action plan?

The churches entirely agree with the need for long-term vision, which will require inbuilt regular reviews, coupled with a short-term action plan. The complex problem of racial inequality arises as deeply entrenched historical prejudices interact with current social tensions and pressures. We acknowledge the fault-lines in Western culture which aggravate the dissonance experienced by BAME people. We contrast the “savage individualism” (as identified by Zygmunt Bauman, in his paper for the Rowntree Foundation on *The Absence of Society*) and the materialism of modern Western life style, with tight-knit family and communitarian groupings of many BAME people from other continents.

We must learn from each other, discovering and acknowledging our common humanity, to create social harmony, and the churches expect to be a part of that conversation, both nationally and locally.

What does 'success' look like? And how do we measure that success?

Success will be measured by adequate representation of BAME people in all walks of life. They must state how they will measure success and whether justice has been achieved. The World Council of Churches report, *Being Church and Overcoming Racism*, talks of transforming "thoughts, words and deeds, that must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures and practices of both church and state". Successful eradication of *racial inequality* will be reflected in equal opportunities in the work place, equal pay, attainment in education, with confident expectation that the road to success is open to all. Meanwhile, the churches welcome all efforts to close the gaps of inequality between different ethnicities, and commit to working with the Government towards that outcome.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain

The Methodist Church

The United Reformed Church

May 2009

For further details please contact Rev Dr Rosemary Kidd, rkidd@baptist.org.uk

Baptist House, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8RT tel 01235 517 700

Appendix 1

Statement from the Baptist Union Council of GB An apology for the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Baptist Union Council of GB met at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick from the 12-14th Nov 07 and had the Transatlantic Slave Trade as the main focus of its Agenda. After many hours of worship, listening and careful conversation the Council unanimously agreed the historic statement below on the subject.

'As a Council we have listened to one another, we have heard the pain of hurting sisters and brothers, and we have heard God speaking to us.

In a spirit of weakness, humility and vulnerability, we acknowledge that we are only at the start of a journey, but we are agreed that this must not prevent us speaking and acting at a kairos moment.

Therefore, we acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation's participation in the transatlantic slave trade.

We acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacy of slavery, and its appalling consequences for God's world.

We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery

We repent of the hurt we have caused

*the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past,
our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our black sisters and brothers,
and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.*

We commit ourselves, in a true spirit of repentance, to take what we have learned from God in the Council and to share it widely in our Baptist community and beyond, looking for gospel ways by which we can turn the words and feelings we have expressed today into concrete actions and contribute to the prophetic work of God's coming Kingdom.'

Appendix 2

A range of BAME members of the churches has been consulted in formulating this response. In particular, the national racial justice coordinators of the three churches have made contributions: Baptist minister, Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts whose roots are Nigerian, URC minister, Rev Dr Michael Jagessar, from the Caribbean (Guyana), and Ms Margaret Sawyer, a Methodist White British woman.