

Speaking Notes
for
The Honourable Ralph Goodale
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency
Preparedness

***Advancing Human Rights Values: Equal Dignity and
Opportunities***

July 5, 2019
University of Regina

Check Against Delivery

Good evening everyone.

It's a pleasure to join you tonight on traditional Treaty #4 territory and in the homeland of the Métis.

My thanks to Kiumbura Githinji for the kind invitation.

I'd also like to thank the African Canadian Resource Network, and all partners and participants, for making this conference both possible and useful.

You've put together a thorough and thoughtful agenda! And I hope I can provide some helpful input.

History is a great teacher. It includes important lessons that are relevant to many of Canada's big political discussions today.

For example, here in my home province of Saskatchewan, it was 85 years ago this summer (July, 1934) when the Hon. James G. Gardiner was sworn in as Premier of the province for the second time. Why does that matter? The answer flows from the results of the two provincial elections immediately before.

Mr. Gardiner first assumed office following a decisive victory in the 1925 provincial election. But in the next vote in 1929, while he again won the largest number of seats, he was reduced to a minority and lost the premiership to J.T.M. Anderson, a right-wing populist who came to power with the backing of the Ku Klux Klan.

It's an ugly scar on Saskatchewan's history that this insidious foreign organization built on hate, fear, intolerance and prejudice once infiltrated our province and occupied a place of apparent respectability.

In the United States, African-Americans were the main victims of the Klan's racism; in Canada they directed their vile mentality against Catholics and waves of non-British immigrants. The good news is that Jimmy Gardiner chose to fight them hammer-and-tong. His core message was about diversity, inclusion and pluralism. And he won in 1934. That's why his second swearing-in was so significant. Imagine the damage if the Klan's preferred candidates had been re-elected.

Mr. Gardiner (and the Depression) drove the KKK out of Saskatchewan. In that 1934 campaign, Anderson lost every seat.

The most troubling thing about this episode, as brief as it was, is that the ascendancy of the Klan in Saskatchewan all happened in an overt and democratic manner. And this is not the only example in our nation's history when simplistic, fear-filled populism has diminished us.

Think of the Chinese head tax, or the internment of Ukrainian Canadians in the First World War and Japanese Canadians in World War Two, or the rejection of south Asians on the Komagata Maru, or the turning away of desperate Jewish refugees aboard the MS St. Louis.

More recently, think of the torrents of abuse on social media directed against newcomers - especially refugees. Listen to the rants of shock-jocks, trolls and bots, the alt-right, yellow vesters, neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Witness the graffiti and vandalism, even fire-bombs, in places of worship. Assaults and hate crimes. Misogynistic attacks. Homophobia. Anti-semitism. Islamaphobia. And the murder of six Canadian citizens only because they were at prayer in a mosque.

Think of Indian residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and more than a hundred years without reconciliation.

Our history records some serious failures. They serve as tough reminders that our pluralism is far from perfect. It cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, it is fragile and demands our constant vigilance and hard work. The most recent statistics show hate crimes on the rise and African Canadians are the third biggest target.

So organizations like ACRN are important.

What began five years ago as a modest network of people of African descent in Saskatchewan has now grown substantially.

You are a strong voice for equal opportunity and social and cultural connections for the diverse, growing and dynamic African Canadian community.

To all of you representing the ACRN, I thank you sincerely for that work, and for helping to remove the barriers faced by historically marginalized communities.

I'm proud to know you're among many organizations keeping us on the right path.

Here at the University of Regina, I'm pleased to see the new anti-discrimination campaign up and running.

It's also gratifying to hear about the U of R's interactive learning tools aimed at preventing unacceptable behaviours in sports, education and the workplace.

Elsewhere in my hometown, I've been inspired by similar efforts at many of our schools, and by the ongoing and advocacy of groups like Spring Free From Racism and the Intercultural Dialogue Institute.

The Government of Canada shares your commitment and your relentless determination to make a better, fairer and more just Canada.

But there is much work to do.

Foreign-born, racialized people earn, on average, 78 cents for every dollar earned by foreign-born non-racialized people.

Indigenous Peoples continue to be over-represented in the federal corrections population. So do Black people.

These are just a few examples of a serious and very complex set of problems.

And we have been working at them – with some real success.

On the jobs front, we are taking significant steps to help newcomers get their credentials recognized and gain their first Canadian work experience.

In March, we announced \$10 million for a Call-for-Concepts under the Foreign Credentials Recognition Program, and we expect that funding to support about 15 different projects to help newcomers find real work in fields in which they already have proven expertise.

We have also developed another new program to help Visible Minority Women find pathways to the labour market. This was in consultation with ACRN and others.

I know you are working on a specific project proposal under this program - in partnership with the Daughters of Africa Resource Centre, and Saskatoon's Truly Alive Youth & Family Foundation. SaskCulture and the Prairie Somali-Canadian Community Centre are also involved.

Final details are still being worked out, but it's looking good. Your project will help visibility minority newcomer women to pursue their chosen professions and succeed in the Canadian job market in the shortest possible time.

In every field, diversity and inclusion are cornerstones of Canadian identity. Our government is committed to fostering a Canada in which everyone is able to fully and equally participate in our economic, cultural, social and political life.

That is the purpose of our Multicultural Program, the roots of which were embedded in the Canadian Constitution by Pierre Trudeau in 1982.

Specifically with respect to African Canadians, Budget 2018 allocated \$19 million to identify and recognize the significant and unique challenges they confront, especially young people. And Budget 2019, provided \$25 million to celebrate and build capacity in Black communities - all in recognition of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

We already made a good start with the recognition of the brave and distinguished Viola Desmond on Canada's 10-dollar Bill.

Budget 2019 also committed \$45 million to a new Anti-Racism Strategy for Canada. Based on extensive public consultations and entitled "Building a Foundation for Change", that strategy was announced last week.

A federal Anti-Racism Secretariat is being established to coordinate all federal initiatives to combat racism and religious discrimination. Among other things, it will work to eliminate racism and discrimination from all public policies. It will seek other opportunities for systemic change and report outcomes to Canadians.

The strategy will also support local community initiatives and build awareness and understanding about the realities too often faced by racialized groups, religious minorities and Indigenous peoples.

In my own responsibilities for public safety, my department and I, and our portfolio agencies - CSIS, the RCMP, CBSA, the Correctional Service, the Parole Board of Canada and others - we are constantly seeking to achieve three simultaneous goals...

... The safety of Canadians and the security of our country, coupled always with safeguarding the precious rights and freedoms that define our free and open way of life.

We too seek to embody inclusivity, anti-discrimination and anti-bias practises in everything we do.

We are incorporating robust gender and diversity analytics into our security policies, programs and services. We seek to ensure that all our employees come to work aware of their own unique backgrounds and biases, and are sensitive to how those things may shape or slant their perspectives.

In making certain decisions that could affect a person's liberties, we try to eliminate superficial biases by removing names and photographs from files, and then basing decisions on just the hard facts in the file.

On other fronts, my department is also hard at work.

We have taken unprecedented steps to list ultra-right-wing, neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups as terrorist entities under the Criminal Code.

We are working hard with our allies in the Five Eyes countries and the G-7 to combat terrorism, violent extremism and hate on On-Line platforms. We want that vile material to be taken down faster, or better still, blocked in the first place. We want the Internet giants to be more helpful to smaller tech companies. And we want more accountability for how their algorithms suck-in the most vulnerable.

We have amended the law to provide expedited, no-wait, no-fee pardons for those who are carrying the stigma of a criminal record for the simple possession of cannabis. The most adversely affected by the old laws were most often Black and Indigenous youth. The path we've opened provides the full protection on the Canadian Human Rights Act.

And finally, we have expanded the Security Infrastructure Program to help vulnerable communities protect their facilities from acts of hate and violence. The rules are now much more generous and the available funding has been quadrupled - for both security equipment and technology and for training.

So we've worked hard to produce better laws and government programs, but in fighting for human rights, the most vital factor is individual human behaviour.

It's incumbent on each of us, in the way we live our lives and treat one another, to uphold the principled values which have shaped Canada - despite our lapses - as a global example of successful pluralism.

Our sense of fairness and justice. A spirit of generosity.
Compassion. Caring and sharing. Open hearts and open minds. Pride in
our vast diversity.

We need to practice the creative arts of inclusion and accommodation - to
make room for one another. To reach out. To listen to each other. To
bridge differences. To try very hard to understand one another.

And then, having listened and understood, we Canadians must be prepared
to act with and for each other, together. Not because it's in the narrow self-
interest of a comfortable majority. Not because we HAVE to. But because
we WANT to. Because the action we take together is right for the fair and
decent and wonderful country we aspire to be.

And thus, Canada is a triumph of the human spirit - built and held together,
not by the force of laws, or the force of arms, or force of any kind, not by a
single language or culture, not by our geography, but by our common
will. And that kind of nation-building - the Canadian way - is a never-ending
process. We're never "done".

Canada is now and ever will be a precious work-in-progress. And every day,
it depends on us, on ALL of us, always, respectfully, hopefully, and with
relentless determination, together.

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