

## Federal Black Employee Caucus Caucus des employés fédéraux noirs

### **Federal Government Workers Organize Against Anti-Black Racism in the Workplace** September 30, 2018 (Ottawa)

Black federal government workers have formed an organization to respond to concerns of anti-Black racism within the workplace. So says Richard Sharpe, one of the organizers of a public meeting of about 60 Black public servants and allies held in Ottawa on August 30.

“This is our FUBU moment,” Sharpe said in his opening remarks, “because the Federal Black Employee Caucus (FBEC) is the first organization Black federal public servants have formed solely to address the issues we face within government departments and agencies.”

“FUBU”, or For Us By Us, is a phrase popularized in the 1990s by Black urban youth to describe and encourage Black-led initiatives.

Federal Black employees say they have not benefited as much as other groups from Employee Equity initiatives and their concerns have not been addressed by current diversity and inclusion narratives. They have instead seen a move away from tangible equity towards a broader “diversity” focus, which has in effect obscured the experiences and issues of Black employees in their workplaces. “All of the issues that groups such as Youth and LGBTQ employees raise are important to discussions around equity rights within federal workplaces, and Black members are represented within those groups as well,” says Sharpe. “However, our concern is the realities of being Black are rendered invisible within this broad diversity narrative.”

According to the FBEC terms of reference, the organization will focus on securing disaggregated Employment Equity data to better understand the realities of Black employees. Disaggregated data would provide a breakdown of the statistics on self-identified Black employees as a subset of the Employee Equity Visible Minority group. The organization will also seek to address the particular mental health needs of federal Black employees who feel they continue to experience racial discrimination, harassment and a lack of career progression at higher rates than white and other racialized employees.

In the absence of disaggregated data, FBEC made a call out to members for their personal experiences of discrimination and anti-Black racism in their workplaces. The stories of social exclusion, harassment, criminalization, denied opportunities for training and promotion and countless other experiences, including one participant being called the “N” word, were synthesized and shared in a poignant presentation delivered by co-organizers of the event Liza Daniel and Farah Florestant. “I tried to capture the essence of the stories and pull at the threads that are familiar to most of us as Black folk,” Daniel commented.

The Federal Black Employee Caucus was formed following the inaugural [National Black Canadians Summit](#) held in Toronto in December 2017. Sharpe and colleagues from other departments and agencies have been building FBEC’s membership over the last nine months.

Co-organizer, Robin Browne - explained that the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) provides the impetus for signatory countries to address the particular needs and realities of Black employees of African descent through three pillars - recognition, justice and development. After visiting Canada in 2016, a UN Special Working

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Group of Experts on People of African Descent released a report highlighting systemic anti-Black racism throughout Canadian institutions. The Federal Government has responded to the 47 recommendations from this UN report with the Prime Minister's announcement to commit to the UN Decade for People of African Descent, and the [allocation of \\$42 million](#) in Budget 2018 for anti-racism initiatives, research and programs directed to Black communities in Canada. "It is an exciting time to be Black and to be part of a renaissance," Browne stated, to raucous applause.

The meeting was also attended by members of the Parliamentary Black Caucus, a non-partisan collective of Black senators and federally elected officials who are Black or who represent a constituency that has a large Black demographic. "The Parliamentary Black Caucus is providing leadership in supporting the government on initiatives related to the International Decade", said Greg Fergus, Member of Parliament for Hull-Aylmer. In that context, the Parliamentary Black Caucus wanted to hear first hand about the working conditions for Black public servants, Fergus said.

FBEC members say they plan to engage with government departments responsible for the collection of disaggregated Employment Equity data. They are eager to help address the mental health and well-being challenges faced by Black employees along with the other issues raised at the meeting. They also plan to continue meeting with unions and departmental networks such as the Council of Federal Visible Minorities (CFVM) to support efforts at the national, regional and local levels.

One participant said that while Canada is on the hook to deliver on the International Decade, it was up to Black Canadians to "Show up, speak up, and team up!" to ensure the government fulfills its commitment.

Those wishing to find out more about the FBEC or to become involved are encouraged to connect by email at: [info@fbec-cefn.ca](mailto:info@fbec-cefn.ca).