THE FUTURE OF CCMARD: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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The future of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) can be examined by looking at the way we define ourselves as Canadians. How is our county reflected in the world? What do we value? How do we treat people within our communities?

As Canadians, we often define our humanity by the human rights values we subscribe to, the legislative tools that support them, and by a belief that we respect the rights of all human beings and are above racism and discrimination. We are fiercely proud of our role in the world and the role that a Canadian, John Peter Humphrey, played in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, despite all of the progress that has been made there is still much to do. People of all ages, races, genders, and identities experience various forms of racism and discrimination regularly in Canada. Consequently, there is a need to do more and to take collective action so that we can uphold the values in which we believe, values that are outlined in CCMARD. The foundation of CCMARD is rooted in human rights values and can aid us in achieving truly diverse communities.

We are fortunate to live in an era where universal human rights have been recognized, and great strides have been made towards their realization. The Charter of the United Nations aimed to bring the world out of the destruction caused by two world wars by "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.[1]" Two years after the adoption of the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was formally adopted, expanding the protected rights to include colour, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, and birth or other status. The UDHR does not solely define rights that are protected, but rather begins with the principle that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.[2]" With this principle at its core, the UDHR asserts the inalienable rights of all human beings at birth, providing strength to everyone who champions the tenets of equality and respect. If we are all born equal, then this equality should eclipse any form of racism or discrimination that we have since inherited or been taught. As Kevin Boyle stated in Dimensions of Racism, "it is something we learn and is therefore something we can unlearn. [3]"

Following the creation and adoption of the UDHR, a movement formed in Canada to entrench its principles in domestic human rights laws, starting with the Canadian Bill of Rights, and now the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter outlines equality rights which are further defined as

aiming to prevent the "violation of essential human dignity and freedom through the imposition of disadvantage, stereotyping, or political and social prejudices, and to promote a society in which all persons enjoy equal recognition at law as human beings…[4]" However, it is not just the Charter but also provincial legislation throughout Canada that protects equality rights.

So, what is the future of CCMARD? Key human rights documents were created in the aim to protect fundamental freedoms, of which they have entrenched equality at their very core. If we presume that we value these rights, then we must use all the tools available to embed these principles throughout society. CCMARD is one of these tools. It takes the ideals that we champion and maps out clear steps in order to achieve them. If we stay true to defining ourselves as a country that exemplifies universal human rights, then the future of CCMARD is critical to help us achieve that noble goal. These values that epitomize acceptance and respect cannot be left to human rights documents and legislations, nor can they be left to the tools that guide our implementation of them. Rather, they need to be embedded in the hearts and action of each individual person. It is not laws and rules that create flourishing, safe societies, but the collective actions of people who live and work to create change.

NOTES

[1] Charter of the United Nations. 1946. Chapter 1. Article 1.3

[2] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 1948. Article 1

[3] Boyle, Kevin. Introduction. Dimensions of Racism. United Nations. New York and Geneva. 2005. Page 1.

[4] Lacobucci J. in Law v. Canada.1999