10 YEARS OF COMBATING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION THROUGH THE CANADIAN COALITION: PROGRESS AND PERSPECTIVES

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization · Canadian Commission for UNESCO · Coalition of Municipalities Against RACISM and DISCRIMINATION

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO connects Canadians with the work of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Its aim is to create a society in which Canadians share knowledge and learn from each other, locally and globally, in order to build peaceful, equitable, and sustainable futures. It does so by supporting collective reflection, identifying priorities and facilitating concerted action in the fields of education, science, culture, communication and information to address some of the most complex challenges facing humanity. Recognizing that this mandate can only be fulfilled by engaging a broad range of partners, a spirit of cooperation is at the core of the Commission's work. To promote this collaborative spirit and fulfill the above-mentioned objectives, the Commission set up the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination in 2005.

> *"By taking action to combat racism and multiple forms of discrimination, municipalities are able to build respectful, inclusive and safe societies where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the economic, social, cultural, recreational and political life of the community."* Call for a Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (2005)

Over half of the world's population lives in urban areas[1]. In Canada, that number climbs to 81%, with a little over one third of the total population divided among three major urban centres (Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal)[2]. In light of that data, it is clear that cities must play an increasingly important role in major, international issues, in particular those related to equity and inclusion.

Against this background, the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO would like to take this unique opportunity to review what the Coalition has accomplished over 10 years, celebrate the work of the signatory cities, and highlight their efforts and successes.

This special issue is the high point of a collaborative process that brought together viewpoints from a wide variety of players striving to build a Canada that is free of racism and discrimination. Using an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach, this publication combines a contextual overview of contemporary issues with reflections on various local projects in different regions of the country. The elimination of racism requires a long-term commitment that takes into account the diverse agents of change implicated in this daily struggle. In this publication, a number of authors try to answer the following questions: What challenges does Canada face today? How important has the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination been to date? What are municipalities and their partners doing? What opportunities exist to increase the effectiveness of the work against discrimination at the municipal level and the potential of the Coalition? What are the future prospects of the Coalition?

The ideas and issues presented in this special issue go beyond the framework of the Coalition and relate to key questions of concern to today's Canadian society. What kinds of discrimination exist in Canada today? Which communities are most at risk of discrimination? Why are municipalities key players in building inclusive communities? Although there is much left to be done, major efforts are being made at the municipal level — in many cases with the support of the Coalition and its

partners. We sincerely hope that municipalities will continue to flourish and learn from each other to create what Canadians deserve: a country where all are treated in an equitable and fair manner.

FROM DURBAN TO PARIS: TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF CITIES AGAINST RACISM

In Durban, South Africa, on September 8, 2001, an important page in the history of the battle against racism and discrimination was written. The symbolism of South Africa is striking, given the country's struggle under Apartheid for many years. To avoid repeating the errors of the past, 12,000 delegates from 194 countries and non-governmental organizations committed to a common agenda to battle racism and discrimination. They prepared, as part of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (better known as the Durban Conference), a declaration and action program that were later adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. They asked United Nations Organization (UN) Member States, UN specialized agencies—including UNESCO—and the other United Nations organizations, to strengthen and adjust their activities, programs and strategies, according to their respective mandates, and in line with the outcomes of the Conference.

In answer to the Durban call to action, the emerging challenges facing contemporary societies, and their impact on various aspects linked to human rights, UNESCO adopted an *Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* (2003). This strategy is closely related to the UNESCO Strategy on Human Rights, adopted the same year following the UN Secretary-General's call to mainstream human rights issues in the United Nations System and the mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach. The *Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* describes conditions needed to guarantee its successful implementation, including the need to involve local players so that international legislative instruments respond more effectively to the real causes and effects of racism and discrimination. Although conventions, recommendations, and declarations are adopted by national governments, many of the principles and rights they contain are directly linked to individual citizens and have an impact on their daily lives. In light of this reality, local administrations acting in proximity to communities and individuals appeared to be the most appropriate bodies through which to translate the ideals identified at the national and international levels into action.

In response to the growing need to act locally UNESCO launched in 2004 the International Coalition of Cities against Racism, a network of cities interested in sharing experiences to improve their policies against racism, discrimination, exclusion, and intolerance[3]. Human rights issues having long been the primary domain of States and as such, the recognition of the important role cities play in these issues is a major turning point in promoting and implementing a number of international normative instruments dealing with human rights.

GENESIS OF THE CANADIAN COALITION OF MUNICIPALITIES AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

In light of emerging challenges connected to racism and discrimination in Canada, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO consulted various players (municipalities, human rights commissions, researchers, etc.) in 2005 to discuss the feasibility of, and interest in, a nation-wide, locally based initiative. Interest in a platform to broaden and strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights by coordinating and sharing responsibilities among municipal governments, civil society organizations, and other democratic institutions was affirmed.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO organized and coordinated the activities of a Canada-wide working group to develop and launch the Coalition. The group was composed of representatives from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), the Human Rights Commissions of Alberta and Ontario, the cities of Toronto and Gatineau, and the National Association of Friendship Centres. They developed the text of the Declaration to be signed by municipalities upon joining the Canadian Coalition. They also crafted ten Common Commitments reflective of the Canadian context, inspired by those of the European Coalition of Cities against Racism.

The Canadian Coalition has set itself apart from other regional coalitions in many ways. Besides adapting commitments to the Canadian context, the Coalition was the first organized at a "national" rather than "regional" level (like the coalitions of Europe, Africa, or Asia and the Pacific, for instance). It was also the first to focus on "municipalities" rather than "cities." That distinction is important since it allows the involvement of all municipalities, no matter their size, in the fight against racism and discrimination — issues that are not limited to major urban areas. Finally, the Canadian Coalition was the only one to add a direct reference to discrimination in its name, rather than simply including the term racism, to include other forms of exclusion. In doing so, a framework was being set for comprehensive anti-discrimination work at the local level that would enable the full inclusion and participation of all Canadians.

MUNICIPALITY INVOLVEMENT: MORE THAN A SIMPLE MOTION

Human rights matters are a relatively new area of responsibility for municipalities. Issues such as immigration and the increasing aboriginal populations living in urban centres render questions of inclusion and diversity central to effectively counter racism and discrimination. But these new areas of concern also put new demands on available resources. For this reason, it is imperative that issues of discrimination be addressed with innovative strategies that both engage citizens and lead to change. The Coalition offers a structured but flexible framework to develop these strategies according to ten common commitments in which to focus action.

The Ten Common Commitments are extremely important guidelines for attaining inclusion and equity objectives since they define the common areas in which Coalition municipalities are committed to act. They guide the work of signatories in matters such as employment, education, housing, policing, cultural activities, and public participation. The ten commitments are built around three areas of municipal responsibility, acting as:

- Guardian of public interest
- Protector of human rights
- A community that shares responsibility for respecting and supporting human rights and diversity

While belonging to the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism may begin with city council adopting a motion and signing the Declaration of Commitment, efforts do not end there. Municipalities that join the Coalition commit to developing an action plan based on the ten Common Commitments with their local partners. In many cases, the action plan is a policy or statement on diversity that allows citizens and local partners to understand the directions adopted by their municipalities to improve the quality of life of people marginalised by racism or discrimination.

It is important to stress that there are as many ways to implement the ten Commitments. This flexible approach allows municipalities to adapt their action plans to their specific situations, their issues, and their priorities, while including existing policies and programs upon which they can build and guide their actions. The idea of the Coalition was not to reinvent the wheel, but to offer municipalities and their partners the opportunity to consider, and tools to address, the issues facing their communities. While reviewing the value of projects and programs already in place, municipalities are encouraged to note gaps in their work and areas they would like to prioritize.

The Coalition alone cannot be credited for the projects undertaken after a municipality joins the network. For a great majority of signatory municipalities, joining the coalition has served as a catalyst for the development and implementation of projects to create more inclusive communities. For instance, after joining, some municipalities set up diversity advisory committees or develop diversity policies (as the action plan, or not) with a strategic framework or an implementation plan. Others create a position in the municipal administration to coordinate action on these issues, promote partnerships with local police authorities, or set up awareness, education, or access to employment and housing programs. Others concentrate their efforts on a specific group at risk of exclusion, such as urban aboriginals, young people, or seasonal workers[4].

No matter which approach is taken, belonging to the Coalition carries with it change and political commitment that, in the medium and long terms, will lead to the creation of more inclusive communities for everyone- no matter their race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or intellectual abilities.

THE COALITION: BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

Since its launch in 2005, the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination has made considerable progress. In ten years, 62 municipalities — including large urban centres such as Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Montréal— in ten provinces and one territory have joined the network. Two national meetings and over ten regional or provincial meetings to share best practices and pool efforts on specific issues have been organized with the effects of strengthening local networks. A practical guide for municipalities, highlighting best practices to battle racism and discrimination was launched in 2012, providing easy access to Canada-wide municipal expertise. Policies and programs promoting inclusion and diversity have been created in municipalities and the list grows much longer every day...

However, despite the efforts of municipalities, their government partners, and civil society organizations, we must admit that many Canadians are affected by various forms of racism and discrimination. One Canadian in two claims to have witnessed a racist incident over the last year[5]. Canadian demographics are constantly evolving and are partly the reason for initiatives to promote inclusion, such as those developed by the Coalition. A recent online survey on discriminatory behaviour administered by CBC News shows that Canadians have different viewpoints regarding immigrants when asked about their roles in society and in the labour market. While 75% of respondents consider Canada to be a welcoming country, 30% believe that immigrants "steal jobs from Canadians[6]." This finding is disturbing considering our country is made up of 6.8 million people born outside of Canada (that is, roughly 20.6% of the population)[7]. Among G7 countries, Canada boasts the largest percentage of residents born abroad[8]. Furthermore, according to Statistics Canada (SC) projections (2010), up to 14.4 million (that is roughly one third

of the population) will belong to a "visible minority" group by 2031[9]. In light of such information, investing in projects that create more inclusive communities and combat racism and discrimination means ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to equally contribute to, and benefit from, the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the community.

Besides changing demographics and its effects on the ethnocultural make-up of the country, municipalities face many other challenges.

Municipalities face limitations in terms of human and financial resources and as a result, competition arises between inclusion and diversity objectives and other major issues with a more visible impact (for example, economic or environmental). In addition to this, changes in political directions and priorities can create dynamism but also uncertainty at a program level. These changes have a direct impact on municipal allocation of resources that may also complicate follow-up of commitments made through the Coalition. To counter such challenges, it is critical to invest time and energy in developing and strengthening partnerships with federal, provincial, and municipal government administrations along with various civil society groups, and establish more than one focal point for inclusion issues within the municipality (such as active and focused commitments from the administration, not only city council). In projects promoting a holistic approach, as is the case for with Coalition, partners are essential to share expertise, efforts, and responsibilities. They help build on past experiences and leverage the good work that is already being done, limiting the risk of duplicating participants' financial and human resources, which are often very limited.

Finally, the nature of the projects proposed in the Coalition for the fight against discrimination and racism presents a challenge. Racism and discrimination do not only take form in interpersonal encounters. They are also manifest at a systemic level through policies and programs that create, reinforce, or ignore exclusion. Unfortunately, it is at the systemic level that racism and discrimination is most difficult to identify and address. The systemic nature of the changes necessary for equity is difficult to reconcile with the need to demonstrate concrete and measurable short-term results. Prejudices associated with certain groups are often ingrained in people's minds or culture and require constant effort on many levels, over many years. We cannot change the mentalities within society, or long-standing policies with a snap of our fingers. When the time comes to measure the impact and results of these initiatives and, consequently, to justify the allocated resources, we must take into account the complexity of the issues and recognize that change of this kind takes time.

LESSONS LEARNED

Ten years after its launch, we can make a number of observations on the Coalition and on the role of municipalities in the battle against racism and discrimination.

- It is of prime importance to understand the situation of one's municipality in depth (issues, challenges, existing programs, etc.), to draw as specific a picture as possible, and to position the projects within a flexible framework. The fact that Coalition municipalities can develop an action plan based on their experience and specific context adds to the value of the project and helps bring together a greater number of municipalities and their partners.

- It is important to consider and recognize the needs and mandates of partners and the individuals or groups proposed projects intend to reach. This requires consultation with relevant stakeholders at the beginning of a project, not only at the implementation stage, and keeping them committed throughout the process by respecting each partner's responsibilities.

- It is necessary to recognize partners' know-how and experience to effectively use the strengths of each one. Many "champions" of diversity have emerged through the Coalition experience that, through their dedication and commitment, have helped in the battle against racism and discrimination by fostering, for example, identification of social issues or citizen involvement.

- To ensure the sustainability of an inclusive project, the period and objectives of the commitment must be clear to all. The battle against racism and discrimination involves systemic and social changes that require time and effort. As the old adage says: "Rome wasn't built in a day." It is therefore important that all parties recognize that a long-term commitment is required to reach the common objectives of inclusion and equality.

CONCLUSION

No one likes to talk about racism or discrimination. They are ugly words that speak to even uglier realities. They are words that reveal a facet of our history and our contemporary society that is difficult to face. But it is a challenge we must face for one Canadian living through the experiences and effects of racism and discrimination is one too many.

Concrete action is required to eliminate racism and discrimination and over the past ten years, the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination has provided interested municipalities with the means to engage

publicly and politically to create inclusive communities. By offering a platform to promote mutual learning, the sharing of best practices, open dialogue, and creative problem solving, the Coalition helps to pool and leverage expertise, knowledge, lessons learned, and resources.

By virtue of its embededness into social and institutional life, the fight against racism and discrimination needs a constant and long-term commitment from a broad range of partners. By accepting to work together and play an active role in reaching the ultimate objective —to have communities that are free from racism and discrimination across the country— these partners, both large and small, constitute the key to change and success. If there is one thing that the Coalition has clearly demonstrated, it is that the elimination of racism and discrimination is everyone's business.

NOTES

[1] Data from the World Bank, http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/theme/developpement-urbain?display=graph (site consulted on November 7, 2014)

[2] Employment and Social Development Canada, www4.rhdcc.gc.ca/.3nd.3c.1t.4r@-fra.jsp?iid=34#M_2 (site consulted on November 17, 2014)

[3] For information on this project, please refer to Chapter 2 of the present publication.

[4] *The Toolkit: Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination* (2012) gives many examples of implementation as well as many suggestions to help municipalities prepare to join the Coalition and implement their commitments. The guide is available on line at www.unesco.ca

[5] Survey undertaken by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and the Association of Canadian Studies (2011)

[6] CBC News www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canadian-attitudes-toward-immigrants-conflicted-poll-says-1.2826022 (consulted on November 14, 2014)

[7] Statistics Canada. Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada, 2011.

[8] The Group of seven (G7) – formerly G8 - includes the following States: Germany, Canada, United States, France, Italy, Japan and United Kingdom (the European Union participates as an observer). Russia was a member of the G8 but has been suspended for an indeterminate period following the country's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The group now meets as Group of seven (G7).

[9] Statistics Canada. Projections of Diversity of the Canadian Population, 2006 to 2031, March 2010.