



August 5, 2010

## ***An Open Letter to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper***

Dear Prime Minister:

### **Stop the Attack on Employment Equity**

As Canadians who believe in a discrimination-free society, we are writing to express our grave concerns regarding recent comments made by the Hon. Stockwell Day, President of the Treasury Board, who insinuated that the Federal Employment Equity program is barring qualified Canadians from job opportunities in the federal public service.

We are equally dismayed by similar comments made by the Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, who stated that all Canadians should have an equal opportunity to work for their government based on merit, regardless of race or ethnicity, as if to suggest that unmerited candidates from racialized communities are taking over the jobs of qualified white candidates, thanks to the Federal Employment Equity measures.

The truth, as you are well aware, is the opposite. Employment equity guarantees merit-based hiring because it removes artificial barriers to employment. All too often, qualified candidates from racialized communities do not get hired *because* of their race or ethnicity.

The current legislative framework that supports employment in the federal public service is found in the *Employment Equity Act*, 1995, s. 15 (2) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and provincial human rights legislation and policies. The purpose of this framework is to ameliorate the historical and current marginalization of members of designated groups not only in hiring practices, but in promotion and retention practices as well.

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Yet despite nearly 25 years since the *Employment Equity Act* was first put in place, there continues to be serious under-representation of workers from the Aboriginal communities, visible minorities, women, and people with disabilities in the federal public service, the single largest employer in Canada.

In a recent report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, *Reflecting the Changing Face of Canada: Employment Equity in the Federal Public Service*, the Senate Committee examined issues of discrimination in the hiring practices of the federal public service and found that employment equity targets among the four designated groups were not fully being met, especially for visible minorities. Based on data available for the core public service in 2008-2009, visible minorities were represented at 9.8%, a figure that was much lower than their workforce availability rate at 15.3%.

The fact that discrimination persists despite governments' best efforts should motivate our political leaders to redouble their resolve to advance policies and programs to make our workplace truly inclusive. That Minister's Jason Kenney and Stockwell Day are now asking for a review of the Public Service Employment Act suggests either a lack of understanding of the purpose or the mechanics of the *Employment Equity Act*, or an attempt to divert attention away from the Government's failure to deliver on its obligation to eradicate discrimination in employment.

Contrary to the Ministers' assertion, employment equity has proven to be an effective measure to ensure candidates from marginalized groups get the jobs that they are qualified to do. It also promotes diversity in the workplace, something that most Canadians value. For these reasons, an increasing number of organizations have embraced employment equity as a model for diversity. In short, employment equity makes good sense because it works.

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Rather than perpetuating the myth about employment equity as replacing merit-based hiring, we need you to affirm the Canadian Government's commitment to equity and diversity by strengthening employment equity measures, and by educating all Canadians about the need for such programs.

Yours truly,

PATRICK (SID) RYAN

President

C: T.Downey, M. Kelly, J.Gairey

Attachment

SR/JG/ph/cope343

**Endorsers for the Open Letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper**

African Canadian Legal Clinic

Asian Canadian Labour Alliance (Ontario)

Asian Canadian Labour Alliance (BC)

Association of Chinese Canadians for Equality and Solidarity Society

Association of Ontario Health Centres

Canadian Arab Federation

Canadian Labour Congress

Canadian Media Guild

Canadian Union of Postal Workers

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists Ontario Chapter

Colour of Poverty Campaign

Communications Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada

Decco Painting

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Ethno-Racial People with Disabilities Coalition of Ontario

Equal Pay Coalition

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 353

Income Security Advocacy Centre

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, IAMAW National

Women's Committee and IAMAW National Human Rights Committee

Karuna Community Services

Latin American Trade Unionists Coalition

Mennonite Newlife Centre

Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic

Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children

MISCELLANEOUS Productions

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Ontario Federation of Labour

Ontario Federation of Labour Workers of Colour Committee

Ontario Federation of Labour Aboriginal Persons Committee

Ontario Women's Justice Network

Public Service Alliance of Canada National

Service Employees International Union - National Local 1

Social Planning Toronto

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

Springtide Resources, Inc

United Food & Commercial Workers - National

UNITE HERE Canada

Unite Local 75

United Steel Workers National Human Rights Committee & National Women's  
Committee

Urban Alliance on Race Relations

Women's Legal Education and Action Fund

Jonathan Allan (Co-Founder, Communications and Public Relations Officer  
Canadians Advocating Political Participation)

Paul Clifford, Executive VP, UNITE Canada

Archana Mary Mathew (Equity Officer OPSEU)

Mary Cornish (Lawyer)

Susan Eng (Lawyer)

Lise Lareau (National President, Canadian Media Guild)

Chrysanthi Michaelides (co-Founder, Canadians Advocating Political Participation)

Winnie Ng

Billy O'Neill (CAW Local 707, Human Rights and Pride Chairperson)

Judy Rebick (Activist)

Abe Rosner (National Representative, CAW Canada)

Sid Ryan (President, OFL)

Sharleen Stewart (President, SEIU Local 1)

Warren (Smokey) Thomas (President , Ontario Public Service Employees Union)

Fred Hahn (President, Canadian Union on Public Employees)

Dr. Joseph Wong, C.M., M.D., D.Sc. (Founder and Chair Emeritus of Yee Hong Centre)

Nick Worhaug, Canadian Director, UNITE Canada

Gail Nve (Victoria BC)

Zainab Amadahy (Toronto, ON)

Cheryl Benson (Toronto, ON)

Janet Borowy (Toronto, ON)

Elaine Carol (Vancouver, BC)

Josh Cole (Kingston, ON)

Shelley Cooper-Stephenson (Saskatoon, SK)

Robert David

Joel Duff (Toronto, ON)

Colleen Fuller (Vancouver, BC)

Gregory Furmaniuk (Winnipeg, MB)

Melissa Goldstein

Amy Gottlieb, high school teacher

Linda Goossen

Ashley Hunkin (Ottawa, ON)

Susan Keeley (Calgary Alberta)

Deborah Konecny (Toronto, ON)

Jasmine Lauzon

Michelle Langlois(Toronto, ON)

Jason Kunin (Secondary Teacher, Toronto District School Board, Toronto, ON)

Linda MacDonald (Truro, NS)

Renee Martel

Sasha McInnes (Victoria, BC)

Dr. Patricia Molloy

Kim Pembleton (Mount Elgin, ON)

Sara Rans (London, ON)

Robert Richardson

Leslie Rivers-Garrett

Corvin Russell

Elaine Spencer (Red Deer, Alberta)

Kate Tagseth

Jeanne To-Thanh-Hien (Ottawa, ON)

Megan Wainman

David Winn (Victoria, BC)

Cindy Wilkey (Income Security Advocacy Centre)

Raymond Peart (Faculty of Education, York University)

Angela Cruz (International Development Studies Specialist, B.A. Hon. University of Toronto)

Amanda Grzyb (Asst. Professor Faculty of Information & Media Studies University of Western Ontario)

Christie McNabb (Toronto, ON)

Jojo Geronimo (Social Justice Educator, Toronto, ON)

Herman Rosenfeld

Bev Burke (Independent Labour Educator)

Punam Khosla (Toronto, ON)

Norman (Otis) Richmond (Toronto, ON)

Roger Kishi (Cumberland, BC)

Amal Rana (CEP Local 2025)

Sid Tan (BC)

Lorene Oikawa (BC)

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