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COVID-19 RACIAL INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing today 21 st March 2021, being the United Nation's International Day for the Elimination of Racism to express our concern about the growing crisis in relation to racial inequalities in higher education. We are seeking your urgent support in tackling this important issue.

We work with and support the UK and International Black African and Caribbean students in higher education across the UK. As you are aware, the health of ethnic minorities is disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Additionally, vaccination hesitancy has led to lower vaccination rates within some ethnic minority groups, mainly African and Caribbean communities. Our lived experience of racism partly explains such hesitation and the consequent lack of trust and confidence felt by many in UK African and Caribbean communities, in Government and institutions willingness and commitment to tackle racial inequality.

We believe that the evidence shows that current rates of ethnic disadvantage in education, health and economy have all increased during this pandemic.

The amplification of racial inequality comes as a direct result of the pandemic. It is now doubly important that the Government develops a clear Race Equality Strategy in response. Also, we believe it is essential that within Higher Education, there is a radical reappraisal of the Advanced Higher Education Race Equality Charter (REC) as called for by the [Race Equality Now](#) (REN) campaign supported by Universities and launched in 2020.

[Black Impact](#) and [Make Diversity Count](#) launched the REN campaign and have disseminated a national Black student and staff survey to assess their perceptions of the progress made in implementing the REC.

Race Equality Now has received support from organisations, both within and outside of the higher education sector, including the National Union of Students and Operation Black Vote. The campaign has also received support from Vice-Chancellors and individuals within senior university management.

Prime Minister, we are seeking your public endorsement of the REN campaign and a statement of support. We would like to discuss the REN campaign with Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities, Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, and seek your support to facilitate this meeting.

Far too many Black African and Caribbean students continue to face the reality of differential treatment, racial harassment and sometimes violence on university campuses across the country. Evidence of this discrimination can be found in numerous reports, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission's [Tackling racial harassment: Universities challenged](#) and Universities UK's [Tackling racial harassment in higher education](#).

The systemic issues Black students and staff are experiencing during this pandemic include:

- declining mental health; lack of culturally competent services; 8% of students who experienced racial harassment said they had felt suicidal
- digital and economic poverty; lack of access to educational resources and spaces to complete assignments
- Black attainment gap of 26%; there has been little specialist measures or support put in place to ensure the attainment gap does not widen during this pandemic
- reduced graduate employment rate, e.g. BME graduates with a first degree are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as white graduates[1]
- day to day discrimination at their universities; Nearly 1 in 3 members of staff had experienced racist name-calling, insults and ‘jokes’[2]
- a low disproportion of Black people in leadership positions, e.g. there are only 155 Black professors out of 22,810 professors in the UK[3]
- inaccessible ways to report incidents of racism and investigations not taking place; Two-thirds of students who had experienced racial harassment did not report it to their university. [4]
- International students are facing incredible financial pressures and a high degree of social isolation.

We would like to discuss all of these critical issues with you and your ministers. We would appreciate it if you could consider providing us with a supporting statement for the REN campaign to help us advance the cause of quality, fairness and opportunity for all within higher education.

Yours sincerely,

Ceewhy Ochoga, Founder, Black Impact.

Osaro Otobo, Founder, Make Diversity Count

Hillary Gyebi-Ababio National Union of Students – VP Higher Education