



Statement from the President of the Psychological Society of Ireland on Racism

In the era of COVID-19, we have all struggled with fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and the global impact of this virus feels unprecedented. What the tragic and unjust killing of George Floyd has highlighted to us all is that a global life-threatening virus has been here all along, and that virus is racism.

Racism is not new and does not respect geographical boundaries, it is all around us, but sometimes we don't see it or choose not to see it. The killing of George Floyd has been the tinder stick that that has illuminated the underbelly of institutional and societal racism that has become all too apparent in recent years.

We are fooling ourselves if we believe we are existing in an age of enlightenment. For that to be even remotely true then as societies we need to be more enlightened about what is happening all around us. The whole world is watching on with sadness at what is happening in the United States right now. The scale of the racial inequalities and injustices that are occurring in the United States should not distract from the inequalities and injustices that occur in all our respective countries and communities. In Ireland, the long legacy of discrimination against members of the Travelling Community and in more recent years the inhumanity of Direct Provision should be a reminder to us all that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

It is time that we dispensed with the notion of first, second or third world countries, how can a country claim to be a first world country if everyone of its citizens cannot be guaranteed equal rights. The colour of your skin or your ethnic identity should not determine the extent or limits of your rights.

Voices that call out racism should never be silenced. No-one is a little bit racist; you are either racist or you are not. COVID-19 has in many instances enhanced our sense of community by collectively working together to stay safe, to stay alive. Racism is an anathema to community, it rips communities to shreds and feeds fear, discontent, and hate.

Anyone who is so insecure about their own identity that a person's skin colour is threatening to you, then the harsh and unjustified lens in which you view others needs to be turned inward at your own belief system.

Racism is fuelled by narrow-minded group think as a fragile internal defence mechanism that projects hostility to others. Racism is symbolic of a fragile sense of self that is magnified through affiliation with like-minded individuals that defines itself through the hatred of another.

World leaders, leaders in our communities, individuals, need to engage in more than platitudes or restrict condemnation to social media posts, they need to embed equality in systems, in education and training and in everyday practice and actions.

In the justified rush to find an antidote to COVID-19, let us not forget we have been searching for an antidote to the virus that is racism for much longer. We need not look too far; the answer is already in every one of us. Taking personal responsibility for how we think and act towards those around us is the first step, but we must all take that step together and call out those who refuse to walk together with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MS' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Smyth,
President,
Psychological Society of Ireland
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