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CABL's statement regarding the use of racial slurs in Canadian schools and universities

The Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) is saddened by a string of recent incidents where educators across Canada have uttered racial slurs or allowed racist material to be disseminated throughout their schools. CABL notes the recent events at St. Michael School (Calgary); Bishop McNally High School (Calgary); St. Mary Catholic Secondary School (Pickering); Henri-Bourassa High School (Montreal); the University of Ottawa (Ottawa); McMaster University (Hamilton). In each of these cases, unacceptable racist language was used in an educational context. These events are, sadly, hardly unique, and are emblematic of the systemic and inter-personal racism that many Black students endure throughout their educational journeys.

Racial epithets dehumanize and demean Black people. They have no educational value. They are intended to alienate, disenfranchise and reject the right of Black people to exist as equal in Canadian society. Studying in a discriminatory learning environment has damaging effects on Black students and interferes with their ability to focus on their studies in high school, university and into graduate professional programs. Ensuring that educational spaces are free of discriminatory language helps to ensure that Black students can fully and freely participate in their educational settings. Allowing anti-Black racism to flourish contributes to the low numbers of Black professionals in various fields.

Educational institutions across this country are responsible for ensuring that they provide learning environments that are free of racial discrimination. Developing and enforcing policies that help ensure that racist language is eliminated is one pre-requisite for fostering such learning environments. These recent incidents demonstrate that educational institutions must do more to generate truly inclusive learning environments. In particular, the leaders of educational institutions should ensure the protection of and respect for all students regardless of race, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ethnic background, disability, gender or any form of otherness that is attacked directly, indirectly, consciously or unconsciously.

CABL calls for all leadership to invest in anti-Black racism training and to develop progressive policies to enhance attitudinal shifts. A plan to battle racism will assist in creating a world where apologies are a thing of the past.

CABL continues to be troubled by the prevalence of anti-Black racism that Black people encounter in their daily lives. The treatment of Black students is one manifestation of this racism. We applaud the student groups that have organized protests and drafted statements in response to these issues, and we stand in solidarity with all who are demanding change.

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF BLACK LAWYERS

The Canadian Black Lawyers Association was formed in March 1996, as a national network of law professionals with an overall mandate to promote the advancement of Black Lawyers within the profession by providing support systems, promoting academic and professional excellence and advancing issues of equity and diversity among the bar and judiciary.