

PRESS STATEMENT – 11 January 2017
CURB LAUNCHES TRUTH & RECONCILIATION PROCESS

What kind of Bermuda do we think our children want to inherit? What are we willing to do to create that future?

There's no doubt that Bermuda needs to have ongoing dialogues. The unrest in March and December 2016, and the subsequent unrest earlier this month demonstrates that we are a divided people. Though most Bermudians don't see each other as enemies; the disconnect is palpable.

We speak of working together and unity. However, the racial divide is widening, economic disparity between the races continues to grow; and social media is both educating, and in some people's minds, inflaming passions.

As individuals, and as a community, we need to understand that the trauma of the past continues to play out in our community; we need to acknowledge, learn and embrace our history; we need to honour and teach the stories of those who fought for freedom; we need to raise awareness that a legacy of prejudice and inequity continues; we need to become conscious of the disconnect, misunderstandings and distrust that persist; and we need to repair the damage and provide people with a way towards healing and reconciliation.

In the 1990s the National Association for Reconciliation worked to bring the races together. Between 2000 and 2010, the Commission for Unity & Racial Equality worked to create diversity in our businesses, organizations and the greater community. The Big Conversation in 2007/2008 was groundbreaking. It brought extraordinary speakers from overseas, but received negative media backlash and was not sustained. Since late 2005, members of Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda have worked to sustain the conversation around the need for greater equity and racial justice, and there is no doubt there is an increasing awareness of the need to face these issues and the legacies of the past.

But where do we go from here?

There are some who seek reconciliation through discussion, acknowledgement, education and the implementation of systemic changes, including reparations; there are others who think we need to leave the past behind and move on, believing that simply "talking" about race sustains the discord.

And there have been calls, both past and present, for a "national conversation about race."

CURB believes it is time to begin a truth and reconciliation process to change the way we talk about race, justice and poverty and confront our history of racial inequality and injustice. We cannot move forward as a country until we heal from the trauma of the past.

It is important to continue educational workshops, seminars, lectures and presentations around racial justice issues, but there needs to be another way to build community.

To be clear, larger 'national' events will be planned, but the best conversations occur with 15 – 20 people in a room, creating relationships, community and authentic conversations around social justice, the need for healing and equity. Not just platitudes, but real talk.

Confronting something does not mean it has to be confrontational. Using this platform, participants can speak uninterrupted about their experiences. Telling one's stories is cathartic for those who have been traumatized, and listening to other people's stories leads to greater empathy and

understanding. It allows our humanity to come through and the empathy created, displaces cynicism and distrust. It can lead to tears, but at other times to laughter. Most importantly, connectivity grows. Unity cannot exist without building community.

For this process to be successful, openness, authenticity and trust is critical. Indeed, there can be no systemic change without including relationship and trust building. When we put ourselves in others' shoes, it's harder to think of them as "other." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "My enemy is someone whose stories I don't know."

Small group conversations cannot stand alone. They must be taken from person-to-person; carried group-to-group; and become a national conversation, and ultimately the discourse will create a foundation for policy changes. This translates into a groundswell of community groups, faith communities, organizations, working towards greater equality, racial justice and solutions to resolve racial inequity.

Beginning in February CURB will begin a truth and reconciliation process by creating dialogue groups called "Community Conversations". These will be held in the East, West and Central part of the island.

The groups will be facilitated by trained mediators, facilitators and skilled individuals, and will consist of up to 20 participants who will stay together for a series of conversations over a period of three months. CURB will provide guideline topics for each meeting, and will provide resources that can be shared with groups, in advance, for review prior to the gathering.

It is hoped these groups will build community and find ways to create change within their own sphere of influence, and then share with the greater community.

Most importantly, we will look for the groups to build upon and develop additional ideas to bring about social change and greater racial justice and equity in our society. At the end of the 3-months, the groups will meet as one to consolidate their ideas. Additional groups will be formed later in the year and the process will begin again.

If members of the public, organizations or faith communities are interested in being a change agent and becoming part of Bermuda's truth and reconciliation process, please reach out to us via email admin@uprootingracism.org or call 505 0112.

We urge the community to support Bermuda's Truth & Reconciliation process and create the change you want, by becoming actively involved in creating a racially equitable and socially just Bermuda that our children will be proud to inherit.

Thank you

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