

**THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE COCHRANE
PREMIER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

**NO.: 126-19(2)
DATE: March 3, 2021**

Systemic Racism

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has a moral and ethical obligation to root out racism in our institutions. This obligation extends beyond the overt, visible, and obvious acts of hate and violence that we can easily see and condemn. It includes the subtle, hidden, systemic racism that persists in legislation, policies, and practices.

Systemic racism is real, it exists in the Northwest Territories, and it exists in our government. Some of our institutions, policies, and practices continue to disadvantage or discriminate against black, Indigenous and people of colour. We continue to see examples of people facing discrimination based on their national origin, race, religion, ethnicity, and culture. It is an uncomfortable truth, but one that we must fearlessly acknowledge and confront if we want to change.

Mr. Speaker, the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2019-2023 identifies implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as one of our priorities. Done within the constitutional framework of Canada, this work will advance reconciliation, but is not possible if we do not acknowledge and take tangible steps to eliminate systemic racism.

The U.N. Declaration sets the stage very clearly: “that all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust.”

The Government of the Northwest Territories is taking steps to ingrain these principles into our legislation, policies, and institutions. In December we announced the results of our

work with the Intergovernmental Council; an innovative legislative development protocol, the first of its kind in Canada, that provides opportunities for the collaborative development of land and resource statutes and regulations for the GNWT and Indigenous governments.

Mr. Speaker, the decisions we make as a government must reflect our commitment to reconciliation and the affirmation and advancement of Indigenous rights and self-determination. We must foster constructive and respectful government-to-government relationships with Indigenous partners and seek ways to advance reconciliation, recognize and affirm Indigenous rights, and support expanded program and service delivery.

We also continue to respond to the Calls for Justice in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we are firmly committed to addressing systemic racism in the Government of the Northwest Territories. We are committed to learning from the mistakes of the past, and moving on from colonial, and outdated ways of thinking. We must embrace the principles of the U.N. Declaration, and the principles of anti-racism in the way that we approach all of our mandate commitments.

There are some instances where the path forward seems more obvious, like when we talk about settling and implementing treaty, land, resources, and self-government agreements or in our ongoing work with justice, education and health. But we must also be vigilant in everything we do, to ensure we do not inadvertently continue to perpetuate the past.

This Cabinet has, and continues to update the way we review, discuss, and consider the items that come before us. Mr. Speaker, we have formalized and strengthened the presence of gender and diversity in our financial and policy decisions. I encourage every Minister and every Member of the Legislative Assembly to embrace the principles of the U.N. Declaration, and the principles of anti-racism in every decision you make.

When I worked in social services, I could see the impact that systemic racism has, and eliminating it is a cause that I fully endorse. I do this knowing that the path ahead will be

long and difficult. Undoing years of systemic racism against black, Indigenous and people of colour will take time; change will be incremental; but I am determined.

I know there is a lot of great work happening across government, and I look forward to my colleagues sharing examples of the work they are doing to address systemic racism. I am encouraged, and inspired, by the progress being made, but I acknowledge there is much more to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.