



COMMONWEALTH ORGANISATION FOR SOCIAL WORK

Human Rights for all Peoples in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Charter embodies the values of the Commonwealth and Accredited Commonwealth Organisations (COs), including the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work, are bound to uphold its principles. As a Commonwealth Organisation, we cannot ignore the legacy of colonialism, racism and other discriminations which have left an indelible legacy within the Commonwealth¹. Therefore, in response to the worldwide #BlackLivesMatter protests and the indisputable evidence of structural racism and of persistent discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples and other minorities around the Commonwealth, we reaffirm our commitment to the values expressed in the words of the Commonwealth Charter and recognise our responsibility to uphold those principles in the practice of social work and the education of social workers and to take action to challenge and correct past abuses.

"Affirming our core Commonwealth principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness ... We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments. We are committed to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, for all without discrimination on any grounds as the foundations of peaceful, just and stable societies. We note that these rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively. We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds." [Emphasis added.]

COSW notes that all Commonwealth countries are signatories to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals, which commit governments to the eradication of poverty 'in all its forms', to provision of health services and to protection of the culture of indigenous peoples.

We note that, despite the good intentions and fine commitments of the Commonwealth Charter, health inequalities, poverty and other forms of discrimination continue within and between Commonwealth countries. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black and minority ethnic communities in the Commonwealth gives renewed urgency to the need to challenge structural racism in social work education and practice and to create a society of fairness.

^{1 1} Virtual Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting, 14 October 2020 - CFAMM (VIR)(20)(9)REV3



Recognising that structural oppressions affect everybody, including our own organisations, and that we have an equal responsibility to be self-aware and open to challenge, COSW therefore resolves to:

- work to enhance equal opportunities for peoples of all races, ethnicities and backgrounds, supporting the case for decent work, sustainable livelihoods and health equity, within healthy human settlements;
- raise awareness of the consequences of racism and discrimination throughout the Commonwealth and work with governmental and non-governmental partners to challenge these inequities, in particular as they affect the practice and education of social workers and social work agencies;
- support the inclusion of decolonisation perspectives at all levels of social work education;
- look for respectful ways to memorialise the colonised;
- advocate that all members of our communities must be supported and protected from harassment;
- report to the membership on the diversity of membership of our governance structures and take steps to ensure that our organisation reflects the diversity of the Commonwealth.

Civil society, including Commonwealth Organisations, form the 'Third Pillar' of the Commonwealth. This carries a responsibility to ensure that the experience of local communities and civil society, including the history of Empire and Commonwealth, is recognised and evaluated within the context of our commitment to and engagement with multilateral institutions, such as The Commonwealth.

COSW will continue to work with other Commonwealth Organisations and structures to uphold the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter and calls on all national and local governments, multilateral institutions and non-governmental bodies to work to create a world of *'mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability'* and to demonstrate in practice their opposition *'to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds'*.

Approved by the COSW Board

26 June 2021