



Customs and Immigration Union
Syndicat des Douanes et de l'Immigration

June 5, 2020

BY EMAIL: hon.bill.blair@canada.ca
(original by mail)

Hon. Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A6

RE: Anti-racism training for Customs and Immigration Union members

Dear Minister,

This past week, people from around the world witnessed the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis. These events lay bare the systems and culture that result in unequal treatment and racism in the law enforcement and other institutions. Canada's Prime Minister and many federal representatives have rightly pointed out that although this event took place in the United States, our country is not immune to racism, unconscious bias and systemic discrimination. Police Chiefs and associations have issued open letters calling for reform. The cries of Canadians are loud and clear, they will not tolerate injustice and the Customs and Immigration Union (CIU) adds its voice to theirs.

As you know, the CIU represents some 11,000 members, many of whom are Border Services Officers. While they enforce the law, their role is unique in that they are the first to come into contact with travellers to Canada from around the world.

Many of the CIU's members are racialized and we know that they are hurting. We also know that racism is everywhere, within various groups and in all workplaces. Its impact is far reaching. Our union wants to take concrete steps in an effort to support our members and all those who are also suffering due to racism, discrimination and unconscious bias perpetrated in workplaces and beyond.

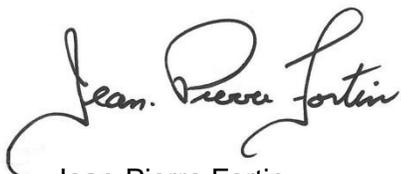
The Prime Minister has pointed out that far too often, our current systems condone and normalize inequality and injustice. He also stated that the Government of Canada is ready to work with Canadians to eradicate racism and has called on allies to help build a fair, better and more equitable country for all.

The CIU National Executive discussed ways in which our union might become such an ally and call on you to work with us to create genuine change. If Canadians are being called on to combat unconscious bias, we asked ourselves how we might participate in that fight. We believe that to achieve societal reform, we will need to replace current "reactive" methods and processes with "proactive" ones. No doubt the Federal government and perhaps you, as Minister of Public Safety, are contemplating various avenues to address this matter. Unions and employers must be active partners in the dismantling of systemic discrimination and the development of a more progressive model of law enforcement.

It is our understanding that many law enforcement organizations provide anti-racism training. The CIU wants to ensure its members have the tools necessary to combat discrimination of all kinds. In-person, comprehensive training will go a long way to preventing the suffering of our members and those they meet and serve, be it in an office, at the border, in an airport or elsewhere. Current and short “presentations” to new recruits do not go far enough and neither will online training ensure that we are equipping our members to address systemic racism and unconscious bias.

The Canadian government has taken a proactive approach to combatting racism, funding a variety of initiatives. In keeping with that approach, we strongly believe that in the long term, funding enhanced training initiatives will be to everyone’s benefit. It is clear that current “reactive” policies and procedures, such as the ones the world has been witnessing lately, are costly and ineffective. Investment in training for CIU members is an important first step to help them to become stronger allies and leaders in the fight against racism and discrimination of all kinds.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean-Pierre Fortin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Jean-Pierre Fortin
National President
Customs and Immigration Union

c.c. John Ossowski, President, CBSA