



Deep Dive: Inequality and Racism

A Deeper Dive on the issues of Inequality and Racism



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Inequality

Economic inequality is out of control. In 2019, the world's billionaires – only 2,153 people – had more wealth than 4.6 billion people. This great divide is based on a flawed and sexist economic system that values the wealth of the privileged few, mostly men, more than the billions of hours of the world's most essential work. That is the unpaid and underpaid care work done primarily by women and girls around the world.¹

To add insult to injury, during the pandemic, the net worth of America's billionaires has soared by \$282 billion.² During the same period, 14 million Americans lost their jobs, 4.2 million became ill and 148,000 have died from COVID-19.³

In Australia, the richest 1% (250,000 people) have more than double the total wealth of 50% of our population (12.5 million people). They own nearly US\$1.6 trillion. That's 22.2% of all of Australia's wealth.⁴

The vast gap between the few rich and many poor in the world can't be resolved without deliberate policies aimed at tackling inequality. Too few governments are committed to implementing these policies – ours included.

¹ Fight Inequality. Beat poverty. OXFAM 2020 <https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/inequality/>

² Billionaire Bonanza 2020. <https://inequality.org/great-divide/billionaire-bonanza-2020/>

³ <https://pewresearch.org> and <https://worldometers.info>

⁴ Fight Inequality. Beat Poverty OXFAM op cit

To quote the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in his Mandela Day speech:⁵

“Inequality defines our time.

More than 70 per cent of the world’s people are living with rising income and wealth inequality. The 26 richest people in the world hold as much wealth as half the global population.

But income, pay and wealth are not the only measures of inequality. People’s chances in life depend on their gender, family and ethnic background, race, whether or not they have a disability, and other factors.....

In this way, inequality works against human development – for everyone. We all suffer its consequences.”

Responding to the pandemic and climate change must also include addressing inequality. We will not achieve a sustainable future for all if the Earth’s resources are not more equitably shared.

Racism

Global anger over racism and inequality has been starkly revealed in the Black Lives Matter and Stop Aboriginal Deaths in Custody protests that erupted around the world after the death of George Floyd while under police control in Minneapolis.

The protests in more than 50 countries have targeted the way police treat black people and highlighted racism and inequality in societies. The protests have also shown that urban populations are in the mood for revolt. That has posed a new challenge for governments that ignore the need for reform to improve lives for the marginalised and poor.

In the US and UK, statues and monuments of people with links to slavery have been toppled by demonstrators. In Sydney, Captain Cook’s statue in Hyde Park was protected from graffiti by police on horseback. Lots of the world’s biggest brands have been quick to pledge their support for the Black Lives Matter movement.⁶

In June, the Right Rev’d Chris McLeod, National Aboriginal Bishop, issued a statement on Black Lives Matter.⁷ He noted that “most people I know would not accept that they are racist, and many take deep offence if you suggest that they might be.

⁵ Guterres, Antonio Mandela Day Address, 2020. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53007952>

⁷ McLeod, Rt Rev’d Chris, A Statement on Black Lives Matter 4 June 2020. <https://www.abmission.org/news.php/519/black-lives-matter>

“Systemic racism operates at the deepest levels of our society. Systemic racism, or institutional racism, by another name, refers to how ‘white superiority’ functions as the norm. It is the lens by which we see all things. It shapes the political system, police force, the educational system, legal system, employment practices, and, yes, even our church. It shapes both you and me.

“All our social contexts are dominated by the often unspoken and unrecognized premise that being ‘white’, with all its associations, is inherently normative. This is why ‘Black Lives Matter’,” said his statement.

For Bishop Chris, Jesus provides the model.



Photo credit: Russell Rollason

Jesus showed solidarity with the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and rejected (Luke 4:18–21). He calls on Christians to be some of the strongest advocates for justice for First Nations peoples, and to work tirelessly and prayerfully to see the end of the senseless deaths in custody. As people of the light, we can begin to walk in the light, and drive out the darkness (John 1:4).

In Federal Parliament, Senator Pat Dodson called on the government to make it a top priority to reduce incarceration rates and children in out-of-home care, saying “now is the time to stop the rot”. “It diminishes us as a nation because we are incapable of dealing with Indigenous incarceration rates in the last ten years,” he observed. 432 First Nation people have died in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991.

Racism and inequality have provided fertile ground for the pandemic and increased its deadly toll. Racism and inequality will equally increase the suffering of many as climate change wields its destructive power.

As we look for a better world to emerge from the pandemic, we must insist that overcoming racism and inequality is central to building global resilience to climate change.

“We urge the whole Earth Community to remain restless until we have named and uprooted all traces of racism and all forms of oppression embedded in our histories, cultures, institutions, policies and structures. Until we have truly delivered dignity and freedom to every oppressed member of the Earth community, let us remain haunted by George Floyd’s call, “Mama! Mama ... I can’t breathe!”⁸

For further reading

Eddo-Lodge, Rene: “Why I am no longer talking to White People about Race”. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Fight Inequality. Beat poverty. OXFAM 2020
<https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/inequality/>

Lindsay, Ben. “We need to talk about Race”. London: SPCK, 2019



Photo credit: Russell Rollason

⁸ Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, June 7, 2020, Gaborone, Botswana.

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