

STUC Black Workers Committee - Open Letter

May 22nd 2020

The STUC's Black Workers Committee, representing Black and Minority Ethnic workers from across Scotland, have outlined their key concerns in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic to the First Minister.

The letter urges the Scottish Government to:

1. Record, analyse and publish the disaggregated data on how COVID 19 has affected Black and Minority Ethnic communities;
2. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic workers are paid well and fairly, and that they have all the protective equipment and rights at work to keep them safe;
3. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic people in hospitals, care homes and other care settings receive equal levels of care that they would expect;
4. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic people in detention centres and prisons are protected and are having their basic needs met;
5. Publish an action plan as to how we address the health, social and economic inequalities highlighted.

The letter can be read in full here:

"Dear First Minister,

The Coronavirus pandemic is a health crisis but it has also triggered economic and social crises. It is this all-encompassing nature that the STUC's Black Workers' Committee wishes to highlight.

It is essential that we highlight the pressing long-standing need which exists, for the health inequalities which are faced by Black and Minority Ethnic communities to be addressed. These inequalities are exacerbated by institutionalised discriminatory practices embedded within the UK and Scottish health systems and which impact on the way in which Black and Minority Ethnic communities access and receive treatment.

The Coronavirus pandemic has starkly exposed these health inequalities again. It is with alarm that we note that BME groups remain over-represented in the "at-risk" communities identified by the Government - something that is even more concerning given the racialised nature of access and treatment within the UK and Scottish healthcare systems.

However, Black and Minority Ethnic communities have also had to endure a lifetime of economic and social inequality.

Black and Minority Ethnic Workers are employed at a higher rate within the key workers category identified by Government and yet are more likely to be paid

less than their white counterparts. They are over-represented in roles and jobs which put them at even greater risk to being exposed to illness and disease.

This is why, as Members of the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) Black Workers' Committee, we are calling upon the Scottish Government to take urgent action to ensure that they immediately record, analyse, and publish the disaggregated data on the number of Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) deaths in Scotland that have occurred as a consequence of COVID -19.

This follows the earlier call from our Chairperson, Usman Ali, on International Workers' Memorial Day 2020, when in a video message he called for data to be recorded and published.

We believe it is essential that this data is published but more importantly, we need our Governments, our Public Bodies and Agencies and employers to take action to address the endemic inequality as a matter of urgency, now, so that our futures are more secure, equal and fair.

Information from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) demonstrates that the death rate for Black and Minority Ethnic men and women in England and Wales is four times that of the white population. We have no reason to believe that this is a trend that won't be replicated in Scotland. We also know that Black and Minority Ethnic migrants seeking asylum, are currently detained, with no (or little) recourse or funds or to help, to access their basic human rights. We note that they are at a greater risk of suicide as a result of the hostile environment they face.

As committed activists, striving for racial equality in Scotland, we are urging the Scottish Government to:

1. Record, analyse and publish the disaggregated data on how COVID 19 has affected Black and Minority Ethnic communities;
2. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic workers are paid well and fairly, and that they have all the protective equipment and rights at work to keep them safe;
3. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic people in hospitals, care homes and other care settings receive equal levels of care that they would expect;
4. Ensure Black and Minority Ethnic people in detention centres and prisons are protected and are having their basic needs met;
5. Publish an action plan as to how we address the health, social and economic inequalities highlighted.

Finally, we are calling on the First Minister of Scotland to herself acknowledge and to condemn the rise of racist rhetoric that we have seen during this pandemic. Divisions are deepening and the First Minister, during her daily televised briefings, has a crucial positive role to play in influencing the public and media sentiment.

We would advise that media and others follow the guidelines issued by the International Federation of Journalists, and the Code of Conduct and Guidelines published by the National Union of Journalists in Scotland and the UK.

By taking this urgent action now, we can rebuild our society to finally tackle the inequalities Black and Minority Ethnic communities have had to endure, particularly in relation to healthcare accessibility and treatments and in relation to employment practices that lead to BME community members being over-represented in low paid employment with limited job progression. By acting now, we can build the fairer, equal and just country and world we all want to see and deserve to live in.

Yours Sincerely,

STUC Black Workers Committee"