

**Speaking Notes**  
**The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella**  
**Speaker of the Senate of Canada**

**The Dominion Institute's "Passages to Canada" Initiative**  
**On the occasion of the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination***  
**Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Minister Kenney,  
Honourable Senators,  
Members of the House of Commons,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you today in marking an important occasion. March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 marked the thirteenth anniversary of the United Nations' adoption and proclamation of the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, a day commemorated just this past weekend by people across the world and throughout our country.

Sadly, the collective history of humankind is fraught with racism and discrimination, whether we speak of the horrific events in world history or small but significant moments in people's individual lives. Each one of us here today can certainly bring to mind many examples of racial discrimination without needing me to prompt you. Some of them will be stories you have heard, some things you have seen, and some will be experiences you have lived through.

There is, however, one event that we all remember in particular, one story that is hard to forget – that we *cannot* forget. It is the reason why this particular day was designated the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*.

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1960, a group of Black South Africans gathered in the several thousands in the town of Sharpeville to protest the pass book laws at a local police station. According to many reports, the crowd that gathered was peaceful. However, at mid-day, after the police failed to disperse the crowd by other means, they opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators. 69 people were killed and 180 were wounded.

This incident rightly horrified the international community. It also showed the world the courage of those South Africans who were willing to stand up for their human rights and speak out against racism.

It took 30 years before the Apartheid laws were repealed in South Africa. And the world did not and *has not* forgotten what happened in Sharpeville. In 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared March 21<sup>st</sup>, the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. It also called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. This important day continues to be commemorated so that we may remind ourselves every year – that we *must remember every day* – how important it is to be aware that racism is still pervasive throughout the world and that the fight against it continues.

This day is now marked throughout Canada and across the world. Canada was one of the first countries to support the UN initiative and launched its first annual campaign against racial discrimination in 1989. And rightly so, because Canada is a country that believes in equal opportunity and equal treatment for all people. All Canadians have the same rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and can exercise those rights to realize their full

potential regardless of their ethnic origin, their religion, or the colour of their skin. Each person possesses the same inherent human dignity.

Together we can show the way towards greater tolerance and we can demonstrate what is possible when we overcome racism. We can educate. We can continue to teach about the bravery of the South Africans who protested against racial discrimination on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1960 and about the international community that gathered in its aftermath to fight against racism the world over.

And that is why we are here today and to acknowledge the work of the Dominion Institute of Canada. The Dominion Institute is an organization dedicated to encouraging active and informed citizens; that is dedicated to promoting greater knowledge of our country's history and shared citizenship; and that is dedicated to celebrating Canada, Canadians, and Canadian values.

What it means to be Canadian comes into sharp focus on a day like the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. The Constitution of Canada, in particular the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, confirms that all Canadians are equal. The Charter also confirms Canada is a multicultural society. As a multicultural society, where so many Canadians have close connections to other people, countries and cultures around the world, we are well positioned to heed the General Assembly's call to promote an end to all forms of racial discrimination. More than ever, in a world that can be threatened by nationalist, racial, economic and religious divides, Canadians should defend and proclaim the principles of the United Nations: justice, fairness, equality and human dignity. For these are, in fact, Canadian values.

In this spirit, we are fortunate to have the Passages to Canada Program of the Dominion Institute. This program is one of the Dominion Institute's most successful education programs. Since 2002, it has helped educate Canadians on the contributions that immigrants make to Canada. More than 600 immigrant and refugee volunteers have already spoken with over 200,000 young Canadians on themes such as Human Rights, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism education.

I would like to wish the Dominion Institute continued success with its programs and to thank you all for coming.