



ALERT!

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Date: March 18, 2009

To: To all BCGEU members

March 21, 2009 ~ International Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination

*A message from Lorene Oikawa, BCGEU Vice-President
and Chair of the Equity and Human Rights Committee*

It has been almost 50 years since 69 men, women and children were killed by police during a peaceful anti-apartheid demonstration in a black township in South Africa. March 21 was proclaimed the International Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination by the United Nations in remembrance of that dark day in 1960.

As we take time on March 21 to reflect on how diversity enriches our lives, let's consider another commemorative event. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the repealing of a discriminatory clause in the BC Provincial Elections Act. Aboriginals and Canadians of Japanese ancestry were not allowed to vote in BC elections until 1949. Chinese- and Indo-Canadians were allowed to vote only two years earlier.

This anniversary is particularly significant considering we are preparing for a provincial election on May 12. In BC, we decry the low voter turnout. Only about 57% of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2005 provincial election.

While we celebrate our achievements and continue to speak out to improve conditions around the world, we can not escape one basic fact: it is those in power who decide on either regressive or progressive legislation and policies. Voting is an important right – let's use it!

On March 21 and every day, speak out against intolerance in our workplaces, schools, homes and communities. And on May 12 exercise your right to vote.