

# The Salvation Army International Positional Statement

## RACISM

### STATEMENT OF POSITION

Racism is the belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristics determined by hereditary factors and that this endows some races with an intrinsic superiority over others. 'Racism' also refers to political or social programmes built on that belief<sup>1</sup>. The use of the term 'race' itself is contested, but is generally used to refer to a distinct group sharing a common ethnicity, national origin, descent and/or skin colour. The Salvation Army denounces racism in all forms.

Racism is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God and are equal in value. The Salvation Army believes that the world is enriched by a diversity of cultures and ethnicities.

The Salvation Army firmly believes that racism is contrary to God's intention for humankind, and yet we recognise that the tendency for racism is present in all people and all societies. Racial discrimination can take many expressions, including tribalism<sup>2</sup>, casteism<sup>3</sup> and ethnocentrism<sup>4</sup>. Racism is not only the result of individual attitudes, but can also be perpetuated by social structures and systems. Sometimes racism is overt and intentional, but often it is not.

While many Salvationists have acted firmly and courageously against racism, The Salvation Army acknowledges with regret, that Salvationists have sometimes shared in the sins of racism and conformed to economic, organisational and social pressures that perpetuate racism. The Salvation Army is committed to fight against racism wherever it is experienced and will speak into societies around the world wherever we encounter it.

As we pray for God's will to be done on earth as in Heaven, The Salvation Army will work towards a world where all people are accepted, loved and valued.

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Rank-ordering and discrimination have been features of many societies throughout much of human history. However the concept of race based in differences of inherited characteristics like skin colour only emerged in recent centuries<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Collins English Dictionary* – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014; Oxford English Dictionaries, [en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/racism](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/racism); *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism).

<sup>2</sup> Favouritism towards members a tribe or other social group especially when combined with strong negative feelings for people outside the group.

<sup>3</sup> Prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of caste, with origins in India.

<sup>4</sup> Belief in the intrinsic superiority of the nation, culture, or group to which one belongs, often accompanied by feelings of dislike for other groups. (*Collins English Dictionary* - <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/ethnocentrism>)

<sup>5</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *The Historical Origins and Development of Racism* [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_04-background-02-01.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-01.htm). See also, 'Race' in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, eds, David J. Atkinson, David F. Field, Arthur Holmes and Oliver O'Donovan. Downers Grove: IVP 1995.

The concept of race has been used to justify the most appalling policies of discrimination and murder. Science has shown, however, that there is no evidence to support the existence of biologically different human races. There is much more genetic variation within each so-called racial group than there is between them<sup>6</sup>.

Racism is manifest in the tendency to stereotype and marginalise whole segments of populations who are perceived as inferior, or, in some cases, a threat. Racism can take many expressions, including open hatred, indifference, or lack of care. As a result of racism, people are denied opportunities for full participation and advancement in many facets of society. Racial division may be hidden, yet still embedded in institutional life in ethnocentric, class, colonial or xenophobic systems. In many places around the world, racism still denies people access to income, health care, justice, housing, education, employment, human rights and human security.

For many people, decades of racist structures and prejudices have created inter-generational effects and disadvantages. This can be so entrenched in institutions and culture that people can unwittingly perpetuate racial division.

While blatant expressions of racial prejudice are often easily recognised, there are more subtle forms that are recognised only with effort. Addressing racism requires initiatives related to laws, systems, organisational structures and a genuine change in the mind and behaviour of individuals.

## **GROUNDS FOR THE POSITION OF THE SALVATION ARMY**

Scripture reveals that God values and loves the total human family equally<sup>7</sup>. Humanity is created in God's image<sup>8</sup>. Every human individual has God's divine imprint on them<sup>9</sup>. 'From one man he made all the nations'<sup>10</sup>. While every human individual is marked by sin<sup>11</sup>, God wants all to be saved<sup>12</sup>. God shows no partiality<sup>13</sup>.

The idea that the people of Israel are God's 'chosen people' is biblically important, but it is an idea that has too often been misused. Scripture declares that Israel was chosen by God, not because of its inherent superiority<sup>14</sup>, but to be a light to all humankind and a people through whom the Saviour of the world would come<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> e.g., Long JC, Kittles RA. (2003). Human genetic diversity and the nonexistence of biological races. *Hum Biol.* 75(4):449-71.; Alan R. Templeton. (2013). Biological Races in Humans. *Stud Hist Philos Biol Biomed Sci.* 44(3): 262–271.; Bamshad MJ, Olson SE. (2003). Does race exist? *Scientific American.* 289(6): 78-65.

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 3:14-15

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 9:6

<sup>10</sup> Acts 17:26

<sup>11</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>12</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6

Jesus had to defy the first-century convention that said that Jews had nothing in common with Samaritans<sup>16</sup> and had to confront the fact that Jews of that day looked down on Canaanites<sup>17</sup>. After the Resurrection Jesus commissions his followers to go and make disciples of all people groups<sup>18</sup>. He also promises that the Holy Spirit will enable his followers to be his 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'<sup>19</sup>

This is powerfully reinforced with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Fifteen distinct ethnicities and regions are listed in the text of Acts. Each person hears the wonders of God declared in their own native tongue<sup>20</sup>.

All the same, as Peter's encounter with Cornelius<sup>21</sup> and Paul's encounter with the Jerusalem council<sup>22</sup> demonstrate, the Early Church struggled to accept that God's good news truly was for everyone. Nonetheless, Scripture is unequivocal: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are one in Christ Jesus.'<sup>23</sup> The phrase 'one in Christ Jesus' establishes a new identity in Christ, not in gender or class or ethnicity.

The Bible's vision of the heavenly New Jerusalem is one of profound ethnic diversity. John writes, 'there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before of the Lamb.'<sup>24</sup>

## **PRACTICAL RESPONSES**

The universality of God's love is clearly declared in Scripture, and must be actualised in the daily living of people<sup>25</sup>. Racism is a wrong that needs to be countered and calls for truthful acknowledgement, rectification and reconciliation on an organisational, individual and societal level.

### Responding at an organisational level:

The Salvation Army is committed to equality, disavows discrimination and affirms racial diversity. Sorrow and repentance are needed for any negative legacy that past shortcomings have created. We acknowledge that Salvationists have sometimes conformed to economic, political, social and internal pressures that perpetuate racism.

- The Salvation Army will make and encourage efforts to challenge and overcome racism wherever it exists.
- The Salvation Army must always be vigilant and guard against the infiltration of racism in our organisation.

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<sup>16</sup> John 4

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 28:19

<sup>19</sup> Acts 1: 8

<sup>20</sup> Acts 2

<sup>21</sup> Acts 10

<sup>22</sup> Acts 15

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 3: 28; cf Colossians 3:11, Ephesians 2:14

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 7:9

<sup>25</sup> 1 John 4:20

- The Salvation Army recognises the importance of robust systems to report and discuss racism without fear and will endeavour to provide these.
- The Salvation Army will continue to make efforts to ensure ethnic diversity in international and territorial leadership.
- The Salvation Army will promote the value of ethnic diversity and inclusiveness in all expressions of Salvation Army life including prioritising resources for the education and development of all personnel.
- The Salvation Army will regularly review its investment portfolios to ensure that they are consistent with the values and beliefs it proclaims.

#### Responding at an individual level:

- Salvationists are expected to take personal action against racism motivated by their obedience to the example of Jesus and their respect of the image of God in every person.
- Salvationists are expected to seek to influence the attitudes of others by expressly rejecting racial stereotypes, slurs and jokes.
- Salvationists should raise their families to appreciate the diversity of cultures and ethnicities.
- Salvationists are encouraged to join with others in combined efforts to bring about justice for the victims of racism.

#### Responding at a societal level:

The Salvation Army will seek to influence governments, businesses, civil society and other faith communities to:

- Pursue goals of racial and economic justice. This should include efforts to achieve fair working conditions, adequate income, safe and secure housing, educational opportunities that will enhance life, and health care that is accessible irrespective of ethnicity.
- Be aware of its responsibility to promote racial justice and ethnic diversity in private and public sectors of life.
- Avoid and resist rhetoric that can contribute to ethnic stereotyping.
- Encourage all people – especially leaders in society – to recognise the negative effects of racism in society and commit to rid the world of this injustice

**Approved by the General, October 2017**

**The views expressed in this international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.**