

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UNITED KINGDOM SECTION

## 2021 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

### EMERGENCY RESOLUTION

#### E1: Responding to racism at AIUK

**Summary:** Resolution to make organisational changes to address racism at AIUK.

**Proposer:** Katherine Walton - individual member

**Resolution Text:** This AGM instructs the Board to: Commission a comprehensive independent review of racism and wider workplace culture at AIUK, with input from current and former staff, covering:

- The organisation's workplace cultures, and the contribution that human resources policies and practices make to them;
- How policies relevant to racism and wider workplace culture are implemented;
- The extent to which staff feel safe, supported and listened to;
- How concerns and complaints about racism and wider workplace culture are handled, and how just outcomes are ensured for all parties;
- How the Board fulfils its leadership role in respect of ensuring appropriate workplace cultures.

The terms of reference of the review to be agreed with the staff union.

The review recommendations should be translated directly into an action plan, owned by the Board. This plan and progress updates should be proactively communicated to staff and members.

Recruit the next AIUK Director through a transparent process that prioritises anti-racism, and requires the successful candidate to:

- Demonstrate understanding of issues of interpersonal and institutional bias and discrimination, particularly with regard to race;
- Demonstrate experience in fostering equitable organisational processes, policies and culture.

**Proposer Background Note:**

In April, the Guardian reported the experiences of eight current and former employees of racial discrimination at Amnesty International UK (AIUK). They described feeling "dehumanised" over several years as a direct result of their race, with some reporting official grievances. More former staff have since publicly shared similar experiences. These accounts demonstrate the scale of the problem at AIUK and

the serious negative impacts these experiences have had on the mental health of Amnesty staff.

The former staff highlighted that this is not a recent phenomenon, that they have repeatedly spoken out, and that they have not been listened to or taken seriously. The staff union have stated that concerns about racism at AIUK were reported to management as far back as 2017, when the BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) staff group submitted evidence of internal racism.

In an email to lead activists in March, Eilidh Douglas (Chair of the Board) wrote that "Amnesty has not been an effectively anti-racist organisation to date, and that this is unacceptable. We do need to honestly confront our history as an organisation."

This resolution calls for an independent review of racism and wider workplace culture at AIUK. The proposed scope of the review is modelled on the terms of reference of the well-regarded Independent Review of Workplace Culture at Save the Children UK undertaken in 2018 in response to how the charity handled concerns regarding sexual harassment within the organisation.

Kate Allen (AIUK Director) has now retired and been replaced on an interim basis. The resolution calls for the next permanent Director to be recruited through a process that prioritises diversity and inclusion. This call is modelled on the commitment made by Amnesty's International Board in August 2020 to use such a process to recruit Amnesty International's Secretary General.

**Sources:**

1. Guardian article: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/20/amnesty-international-has-culture-of-white-privilege-report-finds>
2. Trade Union resolution and statements by former staff and Board members <https://tinyurl.com/aiuk-racism>

**Board Background note:**

The Board supports this resolution.

**Work to date:**

The Section Board will be instructing an independent law firm, with a reputation for excellence, to undertake an investigation into racial discrimination and workplace culture in AIUK. The Section Board is currently consulting with staff, including representatives who are members of the Unite union, about the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference will be broad in scope to give the investigators wide discretion to examine any materials they see fit.

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UNITED KINGDOM SECTION

The investigators' access will not be restrained by the board or management, and it is entirely up to individuals whether they wish to speak with the investigators. No one will be compelled to do so or fear recrimination if they choose not to.

The investigation aims to get to the heart of the issues so AIUK is in the best position possible for meaningful and lasting structural transformation. That's why the Section Board is seeking the support of a law firm that has extensive experience with independent fact-finding investigations into allegations of harm and with the ability to propose changes to address them.

The Board is committed to the transparency of the investigation's findings and then acting upon those findings.

In March 2021 Kate Allen informed the boards of her decision to retire from AIUK in September 2021. Following discussions with the boards, Kate and the boards agreed that the time needed to organise and run a thorough and open recruitment

process for a permanent Director/Chief Executive to replace Kate could not be completed before her departure, and so to avoid any gap in leadership in the organisation, both the boards and Kate agreed that it would be best for AIUK to recruit an interim Chief Executive, who would on their arrival take over Kate's responsibilities and then be able to provide continued leadership until such time as the permanent Chief Executive is recruited and able to start in post. Sacha Deshmukh joined AIUK as Interim Chief Executive on 19 May 2021 and his handover from Kate Allen is now complete.

The Board is committed to a transparent recruitment process for the next AIUK Chief Executive. Anti-racism is a priority and the successful candidate must be able to demonstrate an astute understanding of, and proven ability to address, interpersonal and institutional bias and discrimination; particularly with regard to race. They will also need to have experience of fostering equitable organisational processes, policies, and culture.

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