



## PROGRAM IN GLOBAL SURGERY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Harvard Medical School

### Anti-Racism Statement

Racism murders. Racism destroys. Racism dehumanizes. We live in a racist world and all play active and passive roles in perpetuating racism: the system of prejudice and discrimination based on the ambiguous social construct of race backed by unequal and unjust power dynamics. Racism is inherent to every aspect of our lives; it is woven into the fabric of society and consequently its effects interface with our work as the research associates, fellows, and faculty at the Program in Global Surgery and Social Change. Therefore, the absence of conspicuous racist actions is not enough. We must be actively anti-racist. We absolutely, unapologetically denounce our wretched racist system and its proponents without exception.

Racism systemically places higher value and opportunity in the hands of a specific race, and as a direct consequence disadvantages another racial group. It is this benefiting of one group to the detriment of another that has led us to focus on anti-racism. The work of anti-racism is allied to that of anti-discrimination and the evaluation of inequities based on gender, sexual orientation, caste, religion, ability, tribal affiliation or socioeconomic status. However, given the distinct relationship of racism, colonialism, and global health, we in the global health community have a moral imperative to shine a bright light specifically on racism within our sphere.

Racism is inherently linked with colonialism. Our work in global health is rooted in colonialism, which provided power to white Europeans through subjugation and exploitation of others. Colonialism subsequently allowed for the creation of the construct of race to justify the dehumanization of those the colonizers exploited. This practice has lived on in global health through the racist belief that those same colonial powers possess medical knowledge that is superior to that of the cultures they denigrated. Consequently, global health is built on a foundation that, at its core, is antithetical to the principle of shared human dignity and respect. Affirming our commitment to anti-racism also affirms our commitment to being anti-colonial.

Academic institutions in high income countries are complicit in and the product of centuries of historic institutional colonialism and racism with over-representation of white voices that are heard on a global scale. We interact with a diverse group of international partners, but cannot truly be equitable partners until we acknowledge and address the place of power and privilege from which we operate.

To implement PGSSC's commitment to antiracism, we will begin by confronting issues of racial inequity in three distinct but related areas.

**PEOPLE:** The voice and actions of PGSSC are defined by those that constitute its people and partners. We will focus on measures designed to improve recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as RAs, Fellows, Faculty, Program coordinators, and support staff at PGSSC, and engage partners who have direct, personal knowledge of the issues we intend to address.

- Increased diversity does not guarantee that power is distributed equitably.
- Practicing accompaniment means that our partners are active members of our community, integral to the partnership. We must be intentional in accompanying the marginalized, and actively engaging in anti-racism in all our collaborations. This means

recognizing and including our Black, Indigenous, and colleagues of color in setting the agenda in all aspects of our academic, policy and advocacy work.

- We will continue to seek out, cultivate, and support partnerships with diverse groups of people.
- We commit to pursuing increased and innovative methods of funding to support RAs, Fellows, and Visiting Scholars participating in the PGSSC.

**CULTURE:** In addition to recruiting diverse voices and viewpoints, we must elevate those voices by advancing a culture that ensures Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in our organization feel valued, respected, and heard.

- We will participate in and lead informed discussions about antiracism through a dedicated anti-racism curriculum; we will educate ourselves about the history of racism and colonialism in health, and address racism in our spheres of influence.
- Further, we will foster these conversations in our broader communities, actively seeking understanding of how racism manifests in the countries where we work through engaging with antiracism groups in each country.
- In instances of conflicting perspectives, we will work to educate regarding the effects of racism, keeping an open mind while remaining constant and unyielding in our stance. Racism is not limited to acts of active discrimination, and we hope to meet each person and group where they are in the process of developing a commitment to active anti-racism.

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:** Although we are a global health organization, we must form a coalition with groups even outside the health sector who share our commitment to anti-racism work. There is a societal obligation to manage complex problems of racism with complex solutions; these solutions require cross-sector input, and we must join forces with groups who share our convictions regarding the importance of antiracism work and the need for enduring, widespread change.

- We will engage with new, different, previously marginalized groups and organizations who share our values regarding issues of racism and systemic oppression due to race.
- We will collaborate with individuals and organizations from different sectors in order to combat silos and disseminate and promote what we learn to our larger community.
- While we plan to engage with alacrity in the formation of coalitions to address anti-racism in myriad domains, including health policy, advocacy, and capacity building that is at the core of PGSSC's work, there are two that bear specific mention in their reach across sectors and fields.
  - *Economic Injustice:* The history of slavery and colonialism and resultant race-based economic policies that persist to this day have limited the accumulation of intergenerational wealth, restricting opportunity, creating hardship, and systematically disenfranchising of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the United States and worldwide. We will collaborate across sectors to reverse the effects of these policies while also working to dismantle and replace them.
  - *Academia:* We acknowledge the role that academia plays in perpetuating structural racism. Academic excellence requires equity, yet despite statements denouncing prejudice, many academic systems are fraught with biases. Notably, it is often Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who are expected to be, and inevitably are, the most engaged in issues of structural racism in academia. This engagement results in activities and efforts leading "diversity, equity and inclusion" initiatives that are not traditionally valued in academic promotion criteria. This reality highlights the need for a paradigm shift in two ways - who shoulders anti-racism efforts, and how anti-racism work is valued and supported

institutionally to ensure that personal and professional goals are being met. We will engage in the broader academic system, outside of our specific purview of global health, to catalyze meaningful change in the culture of academia.

- We will develop these coalitions and partnerships to deepen our cultural competency and approach them from a place of humility.

There is no one simple action that will eradicate racism. Rather, it will take continued vigilance and sacrifice from the PGSSC to eradicate this brutal and evil institutional inequity. The PGSSC team must be proactive in the anti-racism fight. We must ensure inclusivity in color, culture and commitment to social justice at all levels. This is the charge required to be an active agent of change. Without it, we do not stand a chance against a racist system so intertwined in our daily lives that we mistake it for normal. It is not normal. And it is not right.