To: Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
   Jackson Carlaw MSP  
   Richard Leonard MSP  
   Patrick Harvie MSP and Alison Johnstone MSP  
   Willie Rennie MSP  

CC: All other MSPs

3rd September 2019

Dear Party Leader,

An Open Letter to Scottish Political Party Leaders: 20 Years of Race (In)equality in Holyrood

In light of the celebrations surrounding the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) undertook a piece of research to consider how much has been done to advance race equality in the Parliament over these two decades.

I am writing to you as the leader of your party to share some of our findings. Analysing 20 years of debates, committee meetings, and question times, CRER concluded that:

- There have been just five chamber debates since 1999 focused solely on race, four of which occurred in Sessions 1 (1999 to 2003) and 2 (2003 to 2007), with an eleven year gap between Scottish Government debates in 2006 and 2017. Neither the Race Equality Statement 2008-2011 nor the Race Equality Framework 2016-2030 received a parliamentary debate.

- There has been a decline in the number of items of business concentrated on race undertaken by the Equal Opportunities Committee (now the Equalities and Human Rights Committee) since Session 1. A committee report focused on race and employment – Removing Barriers: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment – was not debated in the Chamber.

- Outwith the Equality Committee, the Public Petitions Committee, and the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, no parliamentary committee has undertaken an item of business specifically focused on race equality.

If you don’t challenge racism—who will?
Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights is a Company Limited by Guarantee in Scotland No. 196218.  
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Registered Office: 8 John Street, Glasgow, G1 1IQ
• There has been a decrease in the number of First Minister’s Questions which pertain to race since Session 1. The focus of questions remains largely on racist hate crime, harassment, and abuse, rather than the systematic issues which continue to disadvantage BME groups.

You can read more about our research and findings on our website here.

In a Scotland where BME groups experience disparate rates of under- and unemployment in the public and private sector (despite having the highest rates of educational attainment), where BME groups are twice as likely as white British groups to live in poverty, where there has never been a BME woman elected to the Scottish Parliament, where racist hate crime remains the most commonly reported type of hate crime by a significant margin, and where 22% of those living in Scotland believe there is sometimes a good reason to be prejudiced against certain groups, the deprioritisation of race equality and anti-racism work in the Scottish Parliament is unacceptable.

This is not the place we want to find ourselves in 2019, let alone in another 20 years’ time.

We are calling on you and your party’s elected members, as a new term of the Scottish Parliament begins, to remember to speak out against the racism which exists and persists in Scotland in debates, legislative scrutiny, committee inquiries, and question times. Remember racism and take action when it is time to select candidates and draft manifestos for future elections.

Remember racism – and act to end it – so that the next analysis of race equality in the Scottish Parliament has a very different outcome.

Yours sincerely,

Jatin Haria
Executive Director
Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights
0141 418 6530
jatin@crer.scot