



ACTION FOR RACE
EQUALITY



To: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak
10 Downing Street,
Westminster,
London SW1A 2AA,

Thursday, 14 March 2024

Dear Prime Minister Rishi Sunak,

Subject: Diane Abbott MP

We write to you collectively as concerned citizens and representatives of various national organisations committed to ending racism and promoting equality in our society. With a heavy heart and deep concern, we address the recent revelations surrounding Mr Frank Hester's remarks and the Conservative Party's response to them.

Firstly, we must express our profound disappointment and concern over the initial reluctance of Downing Street and Conservative ministers to denounce Mr Hester's remarks as racist categorically. While we acknowledge the subsequent statement labelling the comments as "racist and wrong," this delayed response is emblematic of a broader, troubling trend within the current government's approach to addressing racism. The hesitancy to immediately and unequivocally condemn such remarks not only undermines the fight against racism but also signals a tacit acceptance of such ideologies within the political discourse.

Moreover, the fact that Mr. Hester felt emboldened to express such vile sentiments, to begin with, speaks to an increasingly normalised culture of racism that has been allowed to fester under the current administration. This normalisation is further compounded by the government's persistent denial of the reality of systemic racism, which has significant implications for the inclusivity and cohesiveness of our society.

The remarks made about Ms Diane Abbott MP are not only abhorrent and frightening, especially considering her status as Britain's longest-serving Black MP and the personal impact these comments have had on her, but they also reflect a broader issue of racism and sexism that cannot be ignored. The donation of £10m to the Conservative Party by Mr Hester and his company, under these circumstances, becomes a matter of ethical concern and raises questions about the integrity and values that the Party wishes to uphold.

We, therefore, call on you, the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party to take immediate and tangible steps to address this situation. This includes a clear statement that the Conservative Party does not endorse racism in any form and is committed to taking a stand against it.

We also urge your government to engage in a more meaningful dialogue on systemic racism, acknowledging its existence and working collaboratively with communities and organisations to dismantle these deep-seated inequities.

We note that you have celebrated the diversity of your cabinet and government. We would invite you to take this opportunity to champion the cause of anti-racism and to lead by example, demonstrating that the UK government is unequivocally committed to fighting racism and fostering a society where equality, respect, and inclusivity are paramount.

Sincerely,

David Weaver Chair Operation Black Vote

Shabna Begum CEO Runnymede Trust

Timi Okuwa, CEO of Black Equity Organisation

Jeremy Crook, CEO of Action for Race Equality

Lee Jasper Chair Alliance of Police Accountability

Viv Ahmun Co-Founder Blaksox

Lord Simon Woolley

Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts: Justice Enabler for the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Minister at John Bunyan Baptist Church, Oxford.

Dr Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Jabeer Butt OBE CEO Race Equality Foundation

NB Please reply to OBV Chair David Weaver info@obv.org.uk