

The Game Changers – Delivering on Race Equality

Speech by Sam Gyimah MP,

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**In recognition of the UN Day for the Elimination of Racial
Discrimination**

A very good morning to you all.

It's a great honour to be here on the day set aside by the United Nations to champion the fight against racism.

Chosen because back in 1966, March the twenty-first was the day when South African police shot dead 69 anti-apartheid protestors in the township of Sharpeville.

It is right that we mark the tragedy, and the innocent lives lost in what proved to be a significant turning point in the fight for racial equality.

But at the same time, I worry there's a danger of designated anniversaries becoming little more than a 'one-day wonder', and not just because there are so many of them.

They let well-meaning people the world over scurry around organising workshops and conferences, 'Doing Their Bit'.

At the end, everyone goes home with a warm glow. Powerpoint slides are packed away – job done! - until next year. When the whole shebang comes round again.

Because the job *isn't* done. Warm words, however heartfelt, do not solve a thing. Actions must happen *every* day of the year for meaningful change to take hold.

So let's make this event different.

The first ever conference on race that spans government departments right across Whitehall – it's already a powerful statement of intent.

Now let's turn it into a Game Changer.

Let's improve the way we attract and recruit talent to the Civil Service.

Let's create an environment that encourages BAME colleagues to stay and – crucially – make steady progress to senior ranks.

And let's look unflinchingly at where we are still failing as a nation to extend opportunity to people from every background. And identify ways to measure how well we're doing.

One way to make this event different is to say, 'Next year, when

we come back to discuss equality, let's have data to look at that shows how far the Civil Service has come in 12 months, or how far off it is from achieving its diversity goals. Let's use this day every year to set out in numbers, where we are.

Because the lesson of government is that only when data is collected does change come. What gets measured, is what gets done. That means listing our triumphs and list what we are vaguely embarrassed by.

And to improve, we need to know what is left to be done.

We know that tackling racial inequality in the workplace is about upholding basic human rights – giving everyone the same chance of getting on the ladder and climbing to success.

But it's also about practical benefits for society as a whole. Diversity is not a box-ticking exercise – it's about strengthening services by drawing talent from the widest possible pool.

In this country, we should acknowledge how far we've already come.

If we take the arrival of the SS Windrush at Tilbury in June 1948 as the symbolic birth of multi-ethnic Britain, that same year the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set a global framework for equalities legislation.

Our Race Relations Act of 1976 stressed the need to avoid

indirect discrimination and created the powerful enforcement agency, the Commission for Racial Equality.

The 1988 Human Rights Act further boosted our protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, colour, language, religion, birth, political opinion and so on.

Yet it is still the case that BAME people are less likely to be in work and – significantly – that when they are in work, they are less likely to be fulfilling their potential.

I was recently talking to a friend, Trevor Phillips, former Chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, who was reflecting rather ruefully on his experience of Senior Civil Service feedback. Perhaps it will sound familiar to some people here today.

He'd done everything that had been asked of him by white society, but was hearing comments along the lines of, 'You're not quite there yet... there's still a way to go...'

It's the experience of the successful BAME barrister who has yet to make silk for reasons never quite explained; the experienced teacher who misses out on becoming head of department; the journalist who never makes it out of the reporting pool. It's their experience of racial injustice – albeit a very different one to that of, say, a packer in a warehouse who is picked upon daily for his colour.

The good news is that, the desire to put right this state of affairs is coming from the very top of government – the Prime Minister has made a personal commitment to make this a country that works for all.

In her very first speech on the steps of No. 10, Theresa May said we had to face up to the uncomfortable truth that this is not yet true for people everywhere, from every background. And she singled out the disproportionately poor outcomes for black people going through the criminal courts among other burning injustices.

David Lammy MP was already working on his review of BAME outcomes in the justice system when Mrs May commissioned an unprecedented race disparity audit of *all* public services - ordering Whitehall to publish data about outcomes for people of different backgrounds across health, education, welfare, housing, justice and employment as well.

The audit will tell us exactly how far we still have to go across the UK – in which places and which services – if we are to have a country that works for everyone. I expect it to create more pressure for change in particular localities and public services – and from central Government too.

Meanwhile, the story across professions as a whole is similarly underwhelming.

It is remarkable how much influence over society – over the

everyday lives of citizens – is in the hands of people who are predominantly white, male and privately educated. In our law courts and universities, our newspapers and television stations, our science laboratories and elite schools, our hospital trusts and political parties – white men are handsomely over-represented.

Only about 6 per cent of MPs in the House of Commons and peers in the Lords are from an ethnic minority background. Unimpressive, given that 14 per cent of the UK population at the 2011 Census were from a BAME background.

Having said that, we are at least moving in the right direction. This is the most diverse Parliament ever, with 41 non-white MPs, compared to 27 at the last General Election. It is also worth noting that when an organisation is committed to change, and focused on it, change can happen very quickly.

[Political content removed]

It might feel uncomfortable even talking about race, but change can happen without a backlash if done the right way.

Journalists? There are no official figures but I can think of only one national newspaper editor from a BAME background – Amol Rajan, who was running The Independent when it went online only and is now the BBC's media editor.

Hardly any opinion-forming journalists either, just columnists from time to time; only Janan Ganesh, of the Financial Times, and a few others from the Guardian.

Judges and lawyers are still predominantly white and male, although, again, recent progress is heartening – just under half the BAME candidates who applied to become QCs this year were selected; the best percentage yet.

Elsewhere, it's a poor figure for the Armed Forces, which is just 7 per cent BAME. National Fire and Rescue? Even worse, at 5 per cent.

Praise is due to the NHS, with the largest share of ethnic minority staff – 18 per cent overall; rising to an impressive 41 per cent of doctors.

And what of the Civil Service?

Well, let me start by saying I believe it's particularly important that the Civil Service accurately reflects the diverse society it represents. Indeed, it should be leading the way.

Not just because government – with a small 'g' – can't really go around preaching the message about diversity if it can't get its own house in order.

But because civil servants will only offer up well-rounded advice to ministers if they truly reflect the diverse nature of multicultural Britain.

And this isn't happening. Hold up a mirror to senior Civil Service ranks and you get a distorted picture of a Britain that is largely white and male. Little wonder junior colleagues feel disheartened when they look at the elite who run the show and see few people like themselves.

We can be misled however, by the need to make the bottom of the pyramid more diverse. That's not the only place where the battle needs to be joined. I understand that in the NHS they call this 'snowy peak syndrome' – a service in which junior and middle ranks have a good representation of colour, but somehow once you get to the metaphorical treeline, the diversity disappears and the top-ranks are all white.

This matters for two reasons. First, if our public services are to serve the public effectively, we need change now, not in 20 years' time. Secondly, organisations that do not show diversity to the top of the employment pyramid, I believe, can find it hard to attract diverse talent – after all, why would a smart woman or smart person of colour choose a career in a body that appears not to be like them very much.

In 2015, while 11 per cent of overall Civil Service staff were from minority ethnic groups, at senior levels the figure was just 7.2 per cent – up from 5 per cent 5 years earlier. Some glaciers move faster.

So that's where you come in. The Game Changers. Not just a set of objectives but the people who're going to make the objectives happen; speed up the rate of change.

By using your networks, getting others involved, working with leaders to get your ambitions woven into the DNA of the Civil Service.

The building blocks are in place – represented today by the four pan-government networks: the Civil Service Race Forum, Race to the Top SCS, Race to the Top G6/7, and the BAME Fast Stream Network.

You're pushing at an open door. There's a new Workforce Plan that commits the Civil Service to becoming the UK's most inclusive employer by 2020.

So go out there. Don't just change the game. Win it.

ENDS