International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recognized today

By today's global standards, Canadians live in a world of diversity, where citizens are free to express their religious beliefs, practice their own culture, and love whomever they choose.

But the fact remains that not all Canadians' freedoms are recognized and accepted, nor is multiculturalism embraced from coast-to-coast.

That's why on March 21, the Hospital Employees' Union – as a social justice trade union representing 43,000 health care workers from diverse ethnic backgrounds – will mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

HEU stands against all forms of ethnic and racial discrimination, from overt expressions of bigotry and hatred toward people of colour and First Nations peoples, to the more subtle forms of oppression that prevent workers from participating fully at work, in their union, and in their communities.

So, what's the significance of March 21?

On that day in 1960, white South African police fired more than 700 shots at peaceful black demonstrators, who were protesting apartheid in the Sharpeville Township of South Africa. Sixty-nine people were killed and 180 wounded. Most were shot in the back.

In 1966, the United Nations declared March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in response to the worldwide outrage over this massacre.

"International days like this give the global community an opportunity for dialogue," says HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson. "As health care workers, it's important to recognize the negative impact of racism – on patients, individual workers, and on the health care team. We need to be inclusive and stand united for equality across-the-board so that all our members feel respected, valued and heard."

March 21, 2014