SLBI statement on Black Lives Matter

Like many other organisations in the botanical, environmental, educational and heritage sectors, the SLBI has been considering its position in the light of recent anti-racism protests.

We fully support the Black Lives Matter movement and want to take our share of responsibility in standing for social justice and ending racism, inequality and discrimination in all forms. This cuts across all aspects of our work, from our people and activities to our living and historic collections.

We recognise that whilst we have always aimed to be anti-discriminatory, there is more that we could do to attract and welcome people from more ethnically diverse backgrounds. We also recognise that black botanists, as well as other skilled workers of colour, are generally underrepresented in our sector.

As we mark 110 years of the SLBI in 2020, we also recognise that like many others in our sector set up in the Victorian era, we were founded on the structures of imperialism and colonialism. Our founder, Allan Octavian Hume, spent many years in the 1800s working for the British civil service in India. However, it is interesting to note that it became clear to him that the 'gross injustice' of British colonialism left the nation needing emancipation and in the 1880s he helped to set up the Indian National Congress.

Today, the Institute is a very different place to that of 1910, but its founder’s aims continue. Over recent years we have created new programmes of work to attract and support those from traditionally underrepresented groups.

However, there is more that we can do to improve equality and diversity and to embrace all communities – not only across race and ethnicity but also age, gender, sexuality, disability, and socio-economic background. This will require work, time and resources but we pro-actively aim to:

* Make our collections more accessible to black, Asian, and other ethnic communities, so that these collections belong to all and are relevant to all
* Research the ‘unseen lives’ among our collections and make them visible to all
* Play our part in supporting and championing today’s black botanists and environmentalists
* Research and publicise the important historic work of little-known black botanists and those from other minority ethnic communities
* Run a series of educational events for people of all ages and backgrounds during Black History Month, October 2020, and in future years
* Recruit new staff, volunteers, trustees and event leaders from minority ethnic communities
* Promote SLBI membership to minority ethnic communities, so that our members and visitors become as ethnically diverse as our visiting school children
* Work in partnership with other organisations across our sector and local community to increase the value and impact of all these areas
* Take time to reflect more on our activities, to learn about structural racism, and to take active steps to become an anti-racist organisation
* Welcome feedback from other individuals and organisations about how we can improve
* Monitor and hold ourselves accountable for the above aims.

As botanists, environmentalists, educators, and curators of heritage, we recognise that we must shine a light on the forgotten people of our sector and show the role that they have played in the SLBI’s history. We must think of Black Lives Matter when we organise new events, buy new books, grow new plants and talk to new people. By doing this, we aim to make our community proud of the SLBI and to ensure that it is still carrying out its important work, reaching and supporting people of all backgrounds, in another 110 years.

C Pankhurst on behalf of SLBI Trustees, 3.7.20