

RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Based on an internal survey, the Black Management Forum (BMF) expresses concern at the increase in racist incidents in the workplace. This statement was issued by BMF managing director **Themba Dlamini** on 27 January 2015.

The BMF conducted a survey of its members to gauge their experiences of racism in the workplace. The results were mixed. On one hand, we found that most working environments are conscious of racism and have created structures to deal with this searing challenge. However, the survey also found that 47 percent of respondents have personally experienced racism at work. Also disturbing was the finding that 50 percent of respondents do not believe that black managers are given the same opportunities as people of other race groups. Another study, also done by BMF Young Professionals, found that the conversion rate of young black professionals from graduate to senior management is far lower than those of other races. The conversion rates were 36 percent for whites, 34 percent for coloured, 51 percent for Indians, and only 17 percent for Africans. The study concluded that entrenched white prejudice is largely responsible for this.

Fifty-one percent of the respondents indicated that their companies provide a conducive environment for reporting and dealing with racism. What the study found more telling, though, was the issue of speaking against racism. There is an even split between those who believe they will be victimised for

speaking against racism and those who believe they have not been victimised. This demonstrates an uneasiness to deal with racism in the workplace – despite a range of instruments created to do so.



Recent incidents of racism reported in the media further indicate that racism is far from something relegated to our past: it is alive and black people continue to be its victims.

When 50 percent of respondents say they do not believe black managers are given the same opportunities as other people of other race groups, and 47 percent state that they have personally experienced racism, this should be a wake-up call to all who believe in an egalitarian and non-racial society.

Recent incidents of racism reported in the media further indicate that racism is far from something relegated to our past: it is alive and black people continue to be its victims. Research done by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation in 2014, which found that a majority of white South Africans do not believe that apartheid was a crime against humanity, as well as the increasing frustrations within the black community when racism seems to be on the increase are causes for concern.

In a country where more than 90 percent of the population is black, we should strive towards zero tolerance of racism. For 47 percent of respondents to say that they have personally experienced racism at work is simply not acceptable. The struggle for freedom and justice in South Africa was simultaneously a fight against racism. Since 1994, many policy and legislative tools have been specifically developed and implemented to address this intractable problem.

The BMF acknowledges that some progress has been made to entrench transformation in corporate South Africa, and that instruments have been created to deal with racism in the workplace. However, this survey tells us that we should continue to be vigilant of racism at home, at work and in the broader society. [NA](#)