

Rt. Hon. Robert Halfon MP

Member of Parliament for Harlow and the Villages



House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Prime Minister
Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
Whitehall
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8 June 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I would like to start by recognising and praising the important advances in racial equality that have taken place over recent decades in this country and your commitment to equality of opportunity and meritocracy.

However, following the despicable and tragic murder of George Floyd in the United States on 25 May 2020, I have received numerous messages from members of my constituency in Harlow, Essex. These residents, who have no political axe to grind, have made it clear to me that members of BAME communities still feel disadvantaged, disenfranchised and discriminated against.

I would like to set out some of the messages I have received from them to exemplify the anguish they feel.

One constituent calls for urgent Government action and writes:

“We aren't sitting in an ivory tower here in the UK, some utopia-free of racism”.

Another, extending her empathy to the black community in America, describes feeling

“undervalued, dehumanised and placed in a box”.

A further constituent states:

“We must stop pretending that racism and anti-blackness are issues that only exist outside of Britain”.

Racism touches every aspect of the lives of those affected. My constituents would, therefore, like to know what the Government will do to improve race relations and combat discrimination at every level. To take just four examples: healthcare provision, the criminal justice system, education and economic welfare.

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First, the COVID-19 crisis has brought healthcare inequalities to the fore. Public Health England's 2020 report, *'Disparities in risk and outcomes of COVID-19'*, explains:

"Death rates from COVID-19 were higher for black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to white ethnic groups".¹

Figures from the ONS reiterates these inequalities, stating:

"Black males [in England and Wales] are 4.2 times more likely to die from a COVID-19 related death."²

Second, inequalities within UK law enforcement remain a source of ongoing concern. The Government's *Race Disparity Audit*, published in October 2017, explains that black people in the UK are

"over 3 times as likely to be arrested than white people and over 6 times as likely to be stopped and searched" by police.³

Third, statistics from the Department for Education also highlight that inequalities still exist in the United Kingdom's education system. For example, At A-Level, only

"5.1% of black students got 3 A grades or better, the lowest percentage out of the 6 broad ethnic groups" in the 2017/18 academic year.⁴

Given my role as Chair of the Education Committee, this is something I have particular concern over and am currently working on an inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education.

¹ Public Health England, *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19*, (2020), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/890258/disparities_review.pdf

² Office of National Statistics, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 10 April 2020*, (2020), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020>

³ Cabinet Office, *Race Disparity Audit*, (2017, revised 2018) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest>

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Fourth, Government figures point to institutionalised inequality in the economy. ONS data from 2018 shows:

“Black people had the highest unemployment rate out of all ethnicity groups”⁵

and that

“Black households were most likely out of all ethnic groups to have a weekly income of less than £400.”⁶

To be clear, I utterly oppose any illegal activity, violence against police or vandalism. Most fair-minded people will be enormously sad at the defacing of the Churchill statue. I therefore welcome the Home Secretary’s commitment to serving justice to the individuals who have perpetrated such crimes. However, this should not distract from the death of George Floyd, nor the legitimate anxieties expressed peaceably by millions BAME individuals across the world.

My constituents would like to hear from the Government the positive and concrete measures that are being taken to solve these problems and ensure that we put equality of opportunity, meritocracy and the banishing of racism first and foremost.

With every best wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Halfon".

Robert Halfon MP

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<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest>

⁶ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/pay-and-income/household-income/latest>