MODULE 11 Transcript

RICHARD: Is that full screen, is it?

SARAH: Yes.

RICHARD: Ok welcome everyone to Module 11, disability and anti-racism, and we have got a good range of people with presenting this afternoon, or this evening, or this morning depending on when you're looking at it. Myself, Richard Rieser General Secretary of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, Sarah Kamau our Chair, who is from United Disabled People Kenya, Thandiwe Mufulo who is one of our vice-Chairs from Disabled People South Africa, June Reimer from Indigenous Peoples Representative on our Committee and First Peoples Disability Network Australia and Rebecca Yeo from UK ROFA International Committee talking about disabled asylum seekers in the UK. This is a huge canvas, we're not going to cover everything, we'll cover more in the seminars but I think this will give a feel to it. So we're going to go to our Chair Sarah to introduce the topic. So here we go.

SARAH: Thank you Richard. Welcome all to this module once again, thanks for hanging in there until now. I will start introducing the disability and anti-racism module by saying as disabled people we live our lives on the receiving end of prejudice and discrimination based on generalised perceptions arising from the false idea of normality. Our identified physical or mental impairments expose us to barriers in the built environment, social organisation and attitudes. Many with hidden impairments feel compelled by the disablist forces in society to pretend they are not disabled and cover up their hidden impairments and resulting barriers they face. Those who are 'Black', or belonging to an ethnic group may also experience another oppression, racism, which is generally based on visually identified characteristics and so they 'cannot pass'. The double whammy of racism and disablism can be a powerfully oppressive and disempowering but can also act as a stimulus to social change. Here we hope to reflect both these forces. When sexism is added to black disabled women it's a triple whammy. We use the term 'Black' in the political sense to relate to all those oppressed by racism, rather than relating to skin colour. Today a broader definition of racism is used, "Racism is defined as the expression of racist beliefs", which are also stereotypes, "racist emotions", which are prejudices also, "or racist behaviours and practices", which are discrimination, "in practice that maintain or exacerbate inequality of opportunity among an ethnic racial group". Racism is one manifestation of a broader phenomena of oppression include sexism, ageism, classism and disablism. According to Oxford Dictionary, racism is defined as "prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalised". At various places and times in history, racism has also become an ideology, the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities or qualities, especially as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another. Segregation in southern states in the US. There are more explicit and extreme versions which are backed by false race science such as under the Nazis or in Apartheid South Africa. The pseudoscience of eugenics has also been applied to disabled people with devastating results. The British Empire used racism to colonise and take over many peoples and countries. Part of this process created unwellness and disability. The resultant and continuing poverty has led to higher incidence of disability.

RICHARD: Thank you very much Sarah. So racism and disability. Racism, by its barbarity and lack of humanity, creates impairment and reinforces disablism on those who survive. It is a mechanism of creating disability. The first especially hit were First Peoples as European expansion threatened First Peoples in North and South America, Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, other parts of the Empire and decolonisation and equal rights is still an issue. While politically these countries may be decolonised, in people's heads they are not. Today inequalities in health arising from racist ideas, actions and white superiority are still leading to disablism and racism amongst surviving populations. The forced mass movement of millions of slaves from Africa to America and the resulting diaspora has left a lasting legacy of poverty, poor health, and disablism reinforced by racism. Here we need to remember that at the time the slave trade was operating, for most of the time the United States was a British Colony, and therefore the British Empire is responsible for the structures of racism that are occurring in the United States and we have seen played out in the last year, by Black Lives Matter. It's part of the same phenomenon. The United Nations' definition of racism, the UN doesn't define racism, it defines racial discrimination according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965. The terms "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or other field of public life. That's pretty comprehensive. All the countries of world have signed up to that, since 1965. It doesn't mean they have actually been implementing it. In 1978 the United Nations Education Scientific Culture Organisation UNESCO declared on race and racial prejudice in Article 1, "All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity". Reason they had to do that, in the 60s there was a resurgence of pseudoscientific racism trying to prove that certain races were biologically intellectually superior than other. This, of course, was nonsense and remains nonsense and even with those who attached to the genome project trying to show genetically it is not the case, they haven't been able to show. There is no scientific evidence to establish distinct biological races. We are all human beings with different characteristics. Even scientists agree that race is at most a social construct and cursory searches of the internet reveal that the broader public is not convinced of this. After all, if an Asian person looks so different from a European, how could they not be from distinct group? Even if most scientists reject the concept of "race" as a biological concept. Undeniably, a social and political concept of racism is a reality, and that's why we have to campaign against it as disabled people, Disabled People Organisations. We have to be anti-racist, and campaign alongside ethnic minorities and racial minorities for equal rights. So where's this roots of racism come from within the British context? It's not just an ideology, it's an institution, it exists at all levels of society. Its origins don't lie in bad ideas or human nature, as has often been said, rather racism originated with capitalism and the slave trade in Europe. Now there were slaves in other societies, over many thousands of years but they were not seen as a different group racially. In fact they were mixed in all sorts of ethnic origins. It is this idea of a people that is the difference. As CLR James, the great economic historian from the West Indies said, "The conception of dividing people by race begins with slave trade. This thing was so shocking, so opposed to all the conceptions of society which religion and philosophers had that the only justification by which humanity could face it was to divide people into races and decide that Africans were an inferior race". Another West Indian historian said, and cricketer, Eric Williams in his book Capitalism and Slavery, "Slavery was not born of racism, rather racism was the consequence of slavery". Now this is a controversial view from a more of a Marxist position and has been challenged by many historians, but we nevertheless find there is a lot of proof for it in what we can find in the archives. The origin of the slave trade we need to go back a bit and here I am using Sivanandan's Roots of Racism from Institute of Race Relations. To justify enslaving humans, Europeans came to argue Africans were inferior not fully human. For centuries Catholicism, the main religion until the Reformation across Europe, had held that a person could only be fully human if he or she was a believer within the true Church and had been baptised. By the way, at that time for many hundreds of years, disabled people were not allowed to be baptised within the Catholic Church and there's a similarity there. So non-Europeans who worshipped different Gods were seen as inferior human beings. In European history this belief had vented itself against Jewish people with waves of virulent Anti-Semitism from the 12th to the 16th century and of course still today. There was therefore a culture of discriminating against and abusing a whole people. This was easily transferred to African slaves and justified the barbarity of their capture, transportation in the Middle Passage and treatment on the plantations. We don't have time today to go into that 400-year history but it is horrific and well worth looking at. Also in the European mind, darkness, fear and evil was seen as the very opposite of Christian whiteness and light. Initial First Peoples then indentured European labour was used on colonial plantations, producing luxury commodities such a tobacco, cocoa, sugar and cotton, but short supply and other issues meant turning to African slaves from about the middle of 15th century. The moral argument later was one for abolition of the slave trade but not until a huge amount of wealth had come to the European nations and particularly Britain who became the premier user of this, after about 1815. In England the abolition of slavery in the colonies took place 28 years later in 1835. The slave interest in Parliament which was strong in the UK Parliament, asked for a massive compensation package which was equivalent of 40% of the GDP of Britain, and taxpayers in Britain were still paying this off in 2015. The equivalent of £300 billion was paid to the slave owners, those 61,000 slave owners. Over the 18th century the UK contribution to the economy from this grew from 3.5% to 11.5%. That's every year, so that's a huge accumulation of capital, and there seems little doubt from recent data from Cambridge that that capital input was the main stimulus for the Industrial Revolution which has led to modern global capitalism today. If we look at the map on the other side you can see the exchange that is going on here. Goods from Europe and ports on the French coast and Netherlands and the Dutch and Portuguese before them, and Britain in particular, Glasgow, Bristol, London and Liverpool were the main slave cities, were sending goods down, for ivory, guns, little trinkets and so on. They were traded all along the African coast which had been opened up 150 years ago before by the Portuguese, on their route to the East. And slave - and forts were built as trading posts, these became slave forts where the interior was raided, not just by white traders but many African tribes were doing this as well and getting paid for it and people were brought to the forts and then took a 12-14 week Middle Passage. They were packed into boats in a very inhuman way and between 9 and 20% of them died on the Middle Passage. The Portuguese did less so in the route to Rio, only 9 to 10% died there but on the Middle Passage for the British it was nearly 20%. And they were selling slaves into middle America, the Caribbean and the southern states. From the southern states their economy grew by providing fish and other products for the slave plantations, this wasn't just Britain but Haiti which was the French plantation in Haiti, St Dominique as it was then was in fact the most wealthy of all these slave islands, producing more at its height before the French Revolution in terms of wealth than anywhere else in the world. This was big, big money coming in and passaging all the way to Europe and of course to America as well, and latent capitalism was developing at the same time from this. An example, you may have seen the news coverage of the toppling of Edward Coulston in Bristol, the slave trader, he was a member of the Royal African Company. Now the Royal African Company was a mercantile English trading company set up in 1660 by the Royal family, the Stuart family and the City of London merchants. It was led by the Duke of York, who was the brother of Charles II and later became the King James II. It shipped more slaves to America more than any other company in the history of the Atlantic slave trade. It was established by Charles II who gained the English throne after the Restoration. While its original purpose was to exploit the gold fields of West Africa, it soon developed and led this brutal trade. It also extracted other commodities from the Gold Coast. After becoming insolvent, it survived in a state much reduced until 1752 when its assets were transferred to the African Company of Merchants, still trading well past the abolition of slavery. We want to look at the quantum of who was involved here. This is slave voyages from 1500 to 1900. Remember slavery didn't stop in Brazil until 1880. 35,000 voyages with 12 to 13 million slaves being shipped and you can see the main routes there that was actually going on. This was a dramatic change to the world that had never been seen before and the ideology that had to go to justify is the root cause of modern-day racism. Compensation, well, just in one of our regions these islands many of them which are their DPOs are members of our organisation, you can see the compensation paid for the number of slaves in each of these British Territories in the Caribbean. Coming to £16.5 million at those prices in 1835. Now most of the people weren't living in the Caribbean, they were absentee landlords, that money was a second impetus into development of industry, banking, insurance and so on. Not a penny was paid in compensation to the freed slaves. In fact in the British, after 1835 they had to do an apprenticeship where they effectively had to work for nothing to get their food and housing. Then after that they had to pay for it so nothing really much changed. Hilary Beckles, a well-known politician in the Caribbean from Jamaica, wrote a famous book which is important, Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide. And he doesn't pull any punches, and he says there is a debt owed by Britain to the Caribbean islands, and talking recently to Floyd Morris of Jamaica who is on the UNCRPD Committee, he has just written to the General Secretary of the UN suggesting they pursue reparations because the heritage of the high levels of disability and poor health infrastructure in the Caribbean is as a result directly of slavery. So we can see just going through this little history that there's a lot there to be talked about ok, but of course racism and the spread of colonisation, not just the European powers but all the European powers were doing this, claiming other people's land and didn't take any notice of it. Let's have a look at a cartoon that has been developed to explain the roots of racism for First Peoples in Canada. [video playing] [bell rings]

RICHARD: Oops sorry. Sorry about that. Hopefully we can restart again. [bell rings] Hey little bro, why so sad? It's nothing. Seriously, what's up? Some kid was making fun of me at school, said my art sucked. Wow that's hard to believe, your artwork is amazing. He must have never seen a whale before. Yeah. He said it was just a stupid Indian drawing. He's probably just jealous because he doesn't have your talent. This a really hard style to master, and it's teaching something handed down for generations. It's how we keep our culture and identity alive. People are often scared of things they don't understand, instead of trying to learn about someone they pre-judge you based on what they think they know. But he was just so mean about it. Let me show you something. Remember when Grandpa used to tell us about our connection to the land? To respect the land and the people that share it with us. Yeah I remember. Right. Not everyone shares our views. For the longest time we have been told we're not part of this land of all. But we have been connected to the land forever. Not everyone believes that. Wow, this is cool! What is it? It's something I have been working on Why is there so much space before contact? Because we were living here long before Europeans arrived. Wow! This how it was on Turtle Island pre-contact. We lived in harmony with the land. This delicate balance allowed us to thrive for generations. Look a ship is landed. Why did that person put a flag there? He's claiming this land for his country. European explorers believed this land was free for them to take, and they set up colonies to expand their empires. They did not consider the indigenous people that had lived here for tens of thousands of years. This is when colonialism started. What's colonialism? Well colonialism is when a culture or country expand their power over another. They believe their way is the right way, and will try to force other cultures to be like them. That doesn't sound too good. It's not. The colonisers want to us be exactly like them, they did not see us as equals. They treated us poorly and called us savages, they wanted to us abandon who we were and what we believed in. In particular they wanted to disconnect us from the land because they wanted the resources it contained. What's important about that year? I will show you. Looks different but feels like home. What's that person reading? He is reading a new declaration, he's telling the people that the land does not belong to them anymore, they have to relocate to an area that is chosen for them. What? How do they get to decide that? They thought they owned this land and all its resources, so they used force to make us move which wasn't right. We were responsible for taking care of the land, the colonisers didn't understand this. They thought they were superior to us and didn't see any value in the way we lived our lives. What you're seeing is the beginning of the reserve system we still live with today. Why are all those people celebrating? Today marks the birth of Canada. Where are all the indigenous people, I don't see any? We weren't allowed to be here. At this time we've still seen as inferior and not even considered human. That's so unfair. Unfortunately, that was the way a lot of people thought in those days. What's happening now? Politicians are approving the Indian Act, it's a law that tells us who we are, where we're supposed to live and what we can and cannot do. It still exists today, but they never identified us as indigenous, they called us Indians and still legally allowed to call us that. But I thought Indians are from India? Man, did they ever get their geography wrong! No kidding. History is written by the oppressors. There's more. Now the agents are creating a registry for those who are status Indians. You mean this? Yes, that card says you're an Indian in the Government's eyes, it's how they keep track of your identity. They can't tell me who I am! That's the kind of power the Government had and continues to have over us. It was worse then. The Indian agent enforced the rules of the Indian Act, they treated us like children. We couldn't leave the reserve with without their written permission. Why is that person taking away the elder's drum? It's sad and disturbing I know, but at the height of their power, agents were able to control many aspects of our lives like our ceremonies. It was illegal for us to practice them. The Government didn't want to us maintain our culture, only theirs. That little boy didn't do anything wrong, why is that man taking the child away? They are taking him to a residential school. The Government thought that if they placed restrictions on our identity, we would abandon who we were and assimilate into Canadian culture. But it didn't work out the way they planned. So the Government thought it was easier to take the children away from their families and teach them what it was to be Canadian. That's not right. It's hard to watch but that's what happened. They tried to erase our identity. Students would get punished for speaking their own language. It was a traumatic experience for everyone that went to residential school. That pain didn't end when they left either. It stayed for generations and we're still feeling the effects today. Why can't that person come in? It looked like he wanted to help them. That's because back in the 1920s it was illegal for us to band together. We couldn't use our resources, raise money or hire lawyers to defend our rights in court. They really didn't want us around, eh? They did whatever they could to make us feel powerless. It wasn't just the Government that was trying to chip away at us. Wait, that kid was happy to see one of our people get shot, we're not the bad guys! No we aren't, but this is the attitude that was being sold to the general public. While the Government oppressed us and made us feel ashamed of who we were, popular culture reinforced it. Corporations use our images as mascots to brand their teams, they hide behind their racist logos and tell us they are honouring us. I don't see any honour in what they are doing. There isn't. What's worse they are treating our identity as something that can be sold, this still happens today. This is where things start getting interesting. It's a time of political and social change, protesters were fighting against oppression to gain equal rights for everyone. We were no different. The Government made another attempt to create a national body and identity and tried to pass the White Paper. On one hand, it would get rid of the Indian Act but would also completely erase our distinction as indigenous people. Wow there's so many of us united. Yeah, I think Government realised just how powerful we are when we stand together. Why does this door have a question mark? Because this part is still being written. I know the racism you experienced was hurtful, but you should never feel alone. You can always find someone to turn to, whether it's me, our family, friends, or teachers. Always remember that we're a strong people, and even though the colonisers attempted to destroy our spirit, we kept our culture alive. Now it's up to us to decolonise and stand up against racism and say, "No more!"

RICHARD: Powerful film there. Over to Sarah, who is going to tell us a bit more about what's going on in Canada today. GEMMA: Sarah, just before you do, Richard we're currently at 28.5 minutes.

RICHARD: Ok that's fine.

SARAH: I will talk about disability statistics for Canada. In 2017, 32% of First Nations people living off reserve, in Canada, 30% of Métis, mixed European and First Nations, 19% of Inuit had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities. 22% of the non-indigenous population had a disability. Rates of disability among First Nations people living off reserve and Métis were higher than for non-indigenous people. This remained true after accounting for differences in age, geography, and population centre size between the population groups. Rates of disability among Inuit were lower, largely because Inuit are younger. Among First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit, disability rates were higher for women than for men. Disability rates increased with age for both men and women. Of all severity levels, mild disabilities were most common among all 3 indigenous groups, and for both men and women. Among all indigenous groups, pain-related disabilities were most prevalent. Indigenous people made up 4.9% of the Canadian population in 2016, according to the census of population. Of the indigenous population in Canada, 58% were First Nations people living both on and off reserve. 35% were Métis, and 4% were Inuit. The majority reported a single indigenous identity, this is according to Statistics Canada in 2017. More than half of First Nations people lived off reserve, that is 56% of those. Canadian racism creates disablement for indigenous people. The statistics are dismal and disgraceful. Factors creating a disabling environment, poverty, disease, alcoholism and unemployment, among indigenous Canadians continue to be an issue. Children raised in this environment have more physical and emotional problems than other children and are more likely to become disabled or become chronically ill than children from the general population. Estimates indicate that nearly 80% of all disabling conditions among indigenous communities are preventable. The lack of appropriate services is evident in many rural areas and reservations and well as in urban areas. Moreover, appropriate usually means culturally appropriate which is what services to any minority group should be but often is not. Jurisdictional disputes about service provision actually lead the list of major headaches for indigenous communities. Such disputes are the source of some of the most inhumane acts ever committed against innocent people, all carried out within the letter of the law.

RICHARD: Here's an example.

SARAH: An example of a lady, Joyce Echaquan, who is an indigenous person, who posted her story about discrimination on Facebook. It says, "The systemic racism endured by indigenous people in Canada's healthcare system exists because the system was designed that way", health minister Patty Hajdu said today after a meeting with representatives from the provinces, indigenous groups and the healthcare sector. "Sadly this is not shocking to me" , Hajdu says, this is the Minister for Health "Racism is not an accident. The system is not broken, it was created this way. And the people in the system are incentivised to stay that way". This is very sad and very against human rights. Hajdu again the Minister for Health, made the comments after attending a meeting with Indigenous Services Minister Marc Miller, Northern Affairs Minister Daniel Vandal and Crown Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett to discuss racism in Canada's healthcare system. The meeting with some 400 participants from across the country was called following the death of an indigenous mother of 7, Joyce Echaquan, who died in Quebec hospital last month. Joyce Echaquan was 37 years old, recorded some of the last moments of her life on a video later released on Facebook. This video captured Joyce Echaquan screaming in distress, along with voices of staff members making degrading comments calling her stupid and saying she would be better off dead. Very sad indeed.

RICHARD: Indeed thank you very much. We'll press on. The same interestingly, more than halfway round the world the same thing can be found from First Peoples indigenous people, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. June Reimer, who is part of our Executive, is going to tell us about their experience.

JUNE: Hello my name is June Reimer, I am a Duulngari-Gumbaynggir woman from Australia. I am currently the deputy CEO of First Peoples Disability Network Australia and I would like to acknowledge all First Nations people who are here today. I would like to talk of the experience of First Nations people with disabilities in Australia. First Nations people with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged of all Australians today. This is because they often face discrimination, based on their indigenality or disability. The disadvantage and discrimination faced by first people with disabilities relates to all facets of their lives, including fundamental human rights of access to shelter, food security, particularly for those First Nations people with disability, living in rural and remote regions of Australia. First Nation Peoples with disabilities also experience serious discrimination, but not excluded to access to education, employment, access to health services, and access to justice. Data shows that a disproportionate number of First Nations people live with a disability or some form of long-term health condition. First Nations people with disabilities are more likely to have experienced threats of physical violence, have poorer health outcomes than other Australians with disability, have experienced problems accessing health services, have been removed or had relatives removed from their families. Experienced high or very high levels of psychosocial distress, been detained due to cognitive disability, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome or other impairments. Are more likely to be relying on Government pensions or allowances as their main source of personal income, and they are less like to be studying and having jobs. First Nations people with disabilities are more likely to have indefinite detention without convictions occurring. When people with disabilities are assessed as unfit to stand trial or not guilty by reason of mental impairment, the situation is disproportionately experienced by First Nations people with disabilities. With many people detained for longer periods then the term they would have been been imposed if they had a criminal conviction. An example being of an indigenous woman with an intellectual disability was regularly kept in isolation for 23 hours a day, at a forensic hospital in Australia, where she lived after exiting prison for more than 20 years. There's over-representation and indefinite detention of First Nations people with disabilities in the criminal justice system. The latest data suggests that First Nations people are 14 times more likely to be in prison and a third of those people are reporting some form of disability. This is one of the most serious human rights related issues in Australia today. Young First Nations people with disabilities may get into trouble and be expelled at school because of not enough attention paid to their disability, which could then lead to juvenile detention and adult prison. We also need to analyse and hear the stories of First Nations people with disabilities in their incarcerations with the police. The very serious concerns on the increasing incarceration of First Nations people with disabilities in Australia, prison, and the lack of progress made to implement Australian's previous UPR, voluntary commitment to address the indefinite detention without conviction of people with disability in our criminal justice system.

RICHARD: We'll move on now and see there's a Disability Royal Commission, 'respectful listening' is what they are talking about and this is an interesting way of gathering people's, the impact of that discriminatory environment for Government, so that they can actually change things. [video playing]

RICHARD: So now we would like to bring in Thandiwe, to tell us about the aftereffects of apartheid in South Africa for black disabled people. Thandiwe.

THANDIWE: Thank you so much Richard. There's stigma and discrimination in South Africa. In South African Section 9.3 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 affords protection against discrimination on the grounds of disability. That is in our Constitution. In South Africa structural stigma is associated with ethnicity, that simply means being black disabled South African is not the same, compared to being white disabled South African. As well as the socio-economic side of it. Individuals with disabilities, especially black individuals were victims of discrimination against their race and physical and or cognitive limitations. South Africa is one country that's has two worlds of the rich and poor, and discrimination is based on race. Discrimination in terms of the denial of opportunities is one of the most daunting challenges faced by black persons with disabilities in South Africa. That's my own observation where I observed that a lot. South Africa has various laws, policies and programmes in place to address poverty and inequality. However, these initiatives are often fragmented and cannot sufficiently address the structural issues that perpetuate extreme poverty and inequality. It is often about a lack of privilege and franchise, which prevents people from confronting discrimination and other rights violation from a place of power. Studies by the World Bank have found that empowerment is not only helpful for governance and growth, it intrinsically improves people's lives. South Africa respect for law and policies. Need to ensure that the UNCRPD is backed by detailed and national legislations which we don't have. Monitor implementation with DPOs and publicly report regularly. Pursue legally hate crime and discrimination against black disabled people in the judicial system. Run campaigns of public awareness in the mass media, to change attitudes and know that racism and discrimination is rife amongst disabled people. Develop the capacity and run disability equality training so that public servants, educators, and employers understand the human rights/social model approach to disability and develop disability friendly policies and practices. Role of white organisations working together with black organisations. Big white companies only work together with white organisations of disabled people. Next. The racial gaps, South Africa disability racial gaps, Dupper argues that "the constitutional right to equality envisages a two-pronged strategy to achieve the goal of substantive equality, the elimination of existing inequality, the implementation of measures designed to protect and advance those people disadvantaged by past discrimination". Disabled people have not only experienced unfair discrimination in the past, but they continue to be at the receiving end of unjustified perception which leads to their continued discrimination and marginalisation. It has been argued that marginalisation of persons with disabilities particularly black, still arises in large part from biased attitudes and a lack of awareness and knowledge rather than from a lack of economic resources alone, yet persons with disabilities remain among the most vulnerable and marginalised. Next. The Convention's lack of implementation is a factor and urgent action is needed. A human rights-based approach to disability needs to be taken by governments of the Commonwealth and needs to help shape a better understanding about black disabled people. I believe that the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum is to push to erase and eliminate such stereotypes in the Commonwealth countries to bring desired change, that is the action that is needed.

RICHARD: Thank you very much Thandiwe.

THANDIWE: Thank you.

RICHARD: Next, obviously as I said we could have done the whole history of the Asian-Indian subcontinent, the decolonisation, the colonisation of Africa, the Pacific Islands and so on. We can't cover everything, but I think we're getting a flavour of this is a pernicious force that is everywhere, no less is it still a force in the UK, despite a whitewashed report that was produced a few weeks ago, which most commentators don't agree is the case, that there is no institutional racism in the UK. I think what Rebecca Yeo here is an expert in disabled asylum seekers, has written her PhD on it, is a member of ROFA, the UK Reclaiming Our Rights Federation, will tell us. Here.

RICHARD: Right I am recording. Now, ok. I would like to welcome Rebecca Yeo who is a disability activist and researcher and is doing work, important work in the area of disability and forced migration. So Rebecca, over to you to fill us in on what you have found out and what's going on.

REBECCA: Hi, thank you. So I have been working with disabled asylum seekers in Britain for about a decade. So I first started trying to bring together a group of disabled people seeking asylum, as part of the project that I was working on with UK Disabled People's Council, but my first hurdle was finding people. So I spoke to the Disabled Peoples Organisations that I knew, but I didn't find any that were aware of asylum seekers among their members. And then I rang a major charity working with refugees and the receptionist there said to me, "Disabled asylum seekers? They don't really exist". So that was the level of ignorance that exists about people who are disabled, and seeking asylum. I have been involved in the disability movement for many years so I was prepared for the everyday barriers, and disregard for the needs of disabled people. I am also the daughter of a refugee so I grew up with stories of the trauma of losing one's homes. I was prepared for the injustice, the hostility of asylum policy, but I wasn't prepared for the casual denial of people's very existence even within organisations that are designed to provide support. Anyway, eventually, a group of 7 disabled asylum seekers came together and we worked together on the project. This group taught me about the relentless and systematic restrictions that hinder access to basic services and support needed to meet human needs. That was in 2013. Now, by now, one of those people out of those 7 people, one of them has been murdered after unsuccessfully seeking police protection. Two people have died of cancer, having delayed seeking medical advice knowing that in Britain, people without legal migration status are not entitled to secondary healthcare, and one person has disappeared after he had been excluded from lots of different support organisations because of his disruptive behaviour related to mental distress. So it's important to be clear that the injustices of the British asylum system are not restricted to people who are already disabled, the lives of many asylum seekers are reduced to struggle for basic survival. Many of these injustices are not the result of oversight, the asylum system is deliberately designed to restrict access to basic services and support. It is deliberately disabling. Now I am focusing on Britain because that's where I am based, I am aware that in some countries disabled people and asylum seekers may have better access to services and support, and that in other places it may be worse. But our focus has got to be on building solidarity, nationally and internationally, and not focusing on who does it better and who does it worse. So I will outline what I have learnt about the injustice that disabled asylum seekers are facing. I will describe what I see as the causes, then I will talk about what I believe, or why I believe some current initiatives actually reinforce the problem before thinking about what we really need to do to challenge the current situation. If we are to build effective resistance, we need to think through what the problem actually is. We need to avoid putting all our energy into reducing some immediate symptoms for some individuals while leaving the causes untouched. So first of all then what is the problem? When I listen to disabled asylum seekers speak about their experiences, I wonder how we have come to a point where people can be treated so badly, the injustice is widespread. For example, among people I know, a woman was in hospital ready for an operation when her migration status was checked, and the operation was cancelled, her support was cut off and then she could no longer walk as far as the food bank. Another person, a young person with haemophilia, was detained on arrival in Britain. He was denied medication until after he had been bleeding for three days, only then was he taken to hospital but in handcuffs. Now enough none of those experiences are unusual and none of them receive media attention. They are just everyday occurrences. There appears to be an increasingly widespread acceptance in Britain that some people deserve human rights but others don't. If that commitment to universal human rights is broken, it becomes an easy step for rights to be removed from ever more people. If we just think through the laws in Britain, so the UN Convention on Status of Refugees was passed in 1951, since then the rights of refugees have been reduced by multiple different acts of legislation. In 1999, the Immigration and Asylum Act removed the rights of asylum seekers to access mainstream benefits, it meant that there was no longer any acknowledgement of the costs of being disabled if somebody was also seeking asylum. When there was no organised resistance about this, from the disability movement, now this might have been because people are focused on the more positive goal of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was passed in 2006. But when the British Government signed that Convention, it added a reservation excluding immigration policy from the Government's obligations. There was little organised resistance. It was probably seen as a minor issue in comparison with the ground-breaking international recognition of disabled people's rights. But then in 2012 in Britain the Welfare Reform Act drastically cut support available for disabled citizens and there are many similarities in this legislation with the legislation for asylum seekers in 1999. A UN investigation of the British Government's approach, referred to it as "grave and systematic violation of the rights of disabled people", but even now, the similarities imposed with policy imposed on disabled asylum seekers, are rarely mentioned. It's as if different standards are acceptable for citizens compared with people seeking asylum. So I suggest that the removal of rights from disabled citizens is the price that we're paying for the lack of solidarity and resistance when the rights of asylum seekers were removed. It would be wrong to suggest that nothing is happening in Britain, so there are some initiatives already taking place. We need to have a quick look at what these are. It maybe that you think that something, doing something is better than doing nothing. But I would say that some action distracts us from the fundamental causes of the problem, and sometimes it reinforces the vision and actually undermines the achievements of the disabled people movement. So in the Home Office, there is now increasing focus on the need to identify people labelled as vulnerable and then support is provided to people on the basis of - Richard, can I cut

RICHARD: Yeah, so I will stop I there. This is the mural that was done in Bristol by this original group of 7 that she talked about, showing the divide between them, the fear that they feel, and the divide from ordinary life as a result of being asylum seekers. Here is article in the local press about it, this was also taken to Parliament and launched and caused some support which was good. So science and racism, we have said about this before, the popular classifications of race are based chiefly on skin colour with other relevant features including height, hair colour and so on. Those physical differences may appear on a superficial level to be dramatic, they are determined by only a minute portion of the genome. We as a species have been estimated to share 99.9% of our DNA with each other, and that's really important. In other words, we are one race, the human race. A few differences that do exist reflect differences in environment and external factors not core biology. Importantly the evolution of skin colour occurred independently and did not influence other traits such as mental abilities and behaviour despite what racists and fascists have said. In fact, science has yet to find evidence there are genetic differences in intelligence between populations. Ultimately, while there are certainly are some biological differences between different populations, these differences are few and superficial. The traits that we do share are far more profound. So that's where we are. Just to round up then, we have learned that Black Lives Matter all sorts of different ways across the Commonwealth and continue to matter. We have to show solidarity with the disability movement and those fighting racism. That attempts to deport people lead to increased mental health and make worse the impairments people already have, and that breaches of human rights of asylum seekers and others will lead to the breaches of our own rights as disabled people. First Nations people need compensation and justice for high levels of disability they experience. And underdevelopment of much of Africa and Caribbean due to the slave trade has led to high level of disability and reparations must be paid, particularly now at the time of COVID. A good start would be to see much more money from Britain going into COVAX. The human rights and justice are still required as racism continues to impact on disabled people in many parts of the Commonwealth, and that's it. So I hope you found that useful. I would like to, I will close this now and just get, if Thandiwe and Sarah can put their cameras on for a second, we will all say goodbye to everybody. So thank you very much, one last word from each of you, one small sentence maybe. If you have got something.

THANDIWE: My input around this is to say once we raise awareness round racism, we are going to win these racism issues and keep on talking so that people can understand and have knowledge. Thank you.

RICHARD: Sarah.

SARAH: Yeah, just to say that racism is not really acceptable, we need to put our voices out so that we can be able to push it away from the activities that we are having, and even the way that we want things to be done moving forward. Thank you.

RICHARD: Thank you and thank you Gemma and Julia for the support, and I will end by saying we can't stand on the sidelines when there are fights about racism going on. We have to be part of the solution rather than the problem, if we don't do that, who is going to support us when we fight for our rights which we still have to do as disabled people. So we have to find solidarity with black ethnic minority disabled people, women and others who are fighting oppression because we're also fighting oppression, called disablism and if we want human rights for all, we have to be vocal and clear and protest to make it happen. Thank you all.