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Circular: **2019HOC0536MW**

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TO: **ALL MEMBERS**

Dear Brother / Sister

GRENFELL: SUGGESTIONS OF RACISM IN OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

There has been some media and public debate around suggestions or accusations that the fire service response to the Grenfell Tower fire may have been influenced by racism. The union responded to the allegations with a statement shortly afterwards, available on the website here www.fbu.org.uk/news/racism-allegations-c4news

This issue has arisen following a Channel 4 News report which included an interview with Baroness Doreen Lawrence. It related to a particular incident at the fire and the tragic experience of one family.

The story of the Tekle family is extremely upsetting and all FBU members will send their thoughts and condolences to them, as we have to all the bereaved families.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire and ever since, firefighters and the FBU have done what we can to support the community devastated by the fire. There have been a number of charity events and the union's Firefighters100 Lottery has made significant donations to various local causes, particularly supporting local young people affected by the fire. On the 14th of every month, FBU members from London and from around the UK join the community silent walk in a sign of commemoration and solidarity.

It has been deeply upsetting to hear suggestions of racism made in relation to the London Fire Brigade's response the night of the fire. We know that all the firefighters attending did whatever possible to save as many lives as they could. Throughout the incident, firefighters put their own lives and safety at risk, in some cases on many occasions. We know that normal procedures to protect the health and safety of crews could not be applied.

The accusation that the actions of any of the firefighters who responded that night were influenced by racism or any other form of prejudice is simply wrong. There is no evidence to support such a claim and it is an unfair and unjust suggestion.

The FBU has made this very clear from the moment the Channel 4 News piece went out. This was done on behalf of all members, but also particularly on behalf of black and ethnic minority members. Many black FBU members made contact with the union to express anger at the comments made by Baroness Doreen Lawrence and how the programme presented them.

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The FBU has a long and proud record of challenging and opposing racism, including within the fire service. Significantly the FBU supported the Stephen Lawrence campaign from the start. Firefighters marched with the family and campaigners in their fight for justice.

We are therefore seeking a meeting with Baroness Lawrence so that we can discuss her comment, explain the anger of FBU members and set the record straight.

Public inquiry process

In the meantime, we continue to prepare for the publication of the first phase report from the public inquiry next week. Our concerns and reservations about the inquiry process have been set out previously.

We will not allow firefighters to take the blame for three decades of failings on the part of government and others in authority.

The report will receive a lot of media coverage, and it is important the union speaks with one voice. We will be issuing an initial comment on the report as soon as possible, which will be shared with members. It is likely that journalists will attempt to speak to firefighters who were there on the night, and from elsewhere. If you are contacted by a journalist for a comment on the report or on the night of the fire, please refer them to the communications team in Head Office at press@fbu.org.uk and 0208 481 1505.

Best wishes.

Yours fraternally

M. Wrack

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General Secretary

MW/jh