



OPEN LETTER TO DONA MEMBERS REGARDING ANTIRACISM EFFORTS

Dear DONA International Members,

Your DONA leadership team – representing more than 5,000 member doulas from 54 countries – is committed to identifying and eliminating processes, practices and perspectives that perpetuate racism and discrimination within our organization and the broader birthing community. While we have made progress toward that end, we still have a long way to go.

To our BIPOC doulas, we hear you. We know that some of you have been hurt by certain DONA leaders, trainers, volunteers and other affiliates who have demonstrated cultural insensitivity, disregard for your concerns, and even overt racism. We sincerely apologize for this detestable behavior and humbly seek your forgiveness as we work to rectify these issues and regain your trust.

We recently initiated an internal audit with the help of a consultant who specializes in diversity, equity and inclusion. Under her guidance, we will undergo leadership training and begin a deep exploration of our impact on our BIPOC members, partners and the broader public. We will also survey our members to help us understand DONA's racial-ethnic climate from your perspective. We hope this exercise will reveal our blind spots and show us how to create a more inclusive culture that values the humanity of every individual.

While change always begins with an honest look inward, it cannot stop there. We must pave a new and better path forward – one that creates a strong, safe and inclusive support system for doulas of diverse backgrounds, and one that appropriately trains and equips our members to serve mothers and families with differing values, beliefs and cultural preferences. Combatting racism within these mission-critical activities will be instrumental in changing the culture of birth around the world, and especially in North America.

Our founders, Annie Kennedy, Penny Simkin and Phyllis Klaus, are joining us on this journey and asked that we share their sentiments below.*

“I wish to fully engage in a process for truth-telling, and hopefully, reconciliation within our organization and to earn the trust of the global maternity care community.” – Annie Kennedy

“I am sorry that DONA leaders are having to rectify the mistakes and omissions of the past and reshape the organization at a time when racism, poverty and violence are causing untold harm to our country, to black lives and all communities of color. I fully and enthusiastically support DONA’s antiracism strategies within the doula profession and the organization’s commitment to examining these issues.” – Penny Simkin

“The verbal or nonverbal belief systems that are injurious to women of color have no place whatsoever in DONA International. We must be attentive in order to avoid any potential and often subtle collusion with systemic racism. If I personally, in any way, have done or said or implied any racist or judgmental attitude, I apologize deeply.” – Phyllis Klaus

Doulas, we value you and the work you do in your communities, and we cannot succeed in this effort without you. With your help, we will persevere in this important endeavor. We will never be perfect, but we will do better. And when we fall along the way, we will acknowledge it, correct it and continue forging ahead.

Thank you for your willingness to labor alongside us as we listen, learn and grow together.

Sincerely,

The DONA International Board of Directors

Board approved September 1, 2020