



# RESPONSE

## ROTA'S RESPONSE TO THE VIRDI INQUIRY

January 2002

Race On The Agenda (ROTA) is dismayed by the findings of the Metropolitan Police Authority inquiry into the Virdi investigation. It is appalling that such an important service as the Metropolitan Police Service is unable to gain the trust of its own staff so that they are comfortable in using the current (although inadequate) grievance procedures. Employees of all organisations (irrespective of their race or gender) should be confident of using official grievance procedures without fear of retribution. If the Metropolitan Police Service's own staff are unable to place their trust in the way the service handles complaints and grievance, members of the public will hardly be assured of the rigorous way their own complaints will be handled.

The Metropolitan Police Service and more specifically the disciplinary procedures that were applied to Sergeant Virdi have been criticised for being institutionally racist. It appears that, despite the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, some of the institutional procedures of the Metropolitan Police Service still disadvantage ethnic minorities. It can be suggested that Sergeant Virdi was not only dealing with a culture of institutional racism but had to deal with racist individuals within the Police Service who still have not been held to account for their actions. For example, the initial investigation was conducted in a manner which identified Sergeant Virdi as the culprit and then sought the evidence to prove this. Sergeant Virdi was subjected to strict disciplinary procedures whilst other officers were spoken to in an informal manner. It is ROTA's view that all officers who were under suspicion should have been subjected to the same strict disciplinary procedures or to the informal approach. The style of the investigation should not have depended upon the ethnic origin of the police officers involved as appears to have happened.

As the Metropolitan Police Service seems incapable of handling its own grievance procedures, ROTA would suggest that internal, independent auditors should conduct investigations into police conduct (such as the Virdi investigation). The Metropolitan Police Authority's role could be developed to conduct such inquiries, rather than wait for the Metropolitan Police Service to conduct an investigation in an inadequate manner and then respond to it through another inquiry. This would save both time and money and restore public confidence in the Police.

R. David Muir, Chairman of the inquiry, found that the Viridi inquiry was restricted by the legislation it was set up under. Under the Local Government Act 1972 there is no power to demand compulsory attendance of witnesses. ROTA recommends changes to this legislation so that in future inquiries the complete facts come to light in the public domain. The Metropolitan Police Service is too crucial a public service to only participate in inquiries on a voluntary basis. The benefit of this is that it will lead to increased accountability from the Police.

ROTA agrees with the inquiry's conclusion that the Branch Boards of the Police Federation need more ethnic minority membership. This should not be done in a tokenistic manner but should involve strategic planning and recruitment by the Police Federation. If the Police Federation is still unable to represent the interests of ethnic minorities and provide appropriate support to officers of ethnic minority origin then it should work with minority organisations that are able to do this adequately.

ROTA recognises **that not all police officers are racist** and that many have developed good relations with the local communities in their areas. However, there still remain individual police officers that are reluctant to understand equal opportunities and how discrimination affects people. As well as dealing with the institutional racism that exists within the structures and procedures of the Police Service, the Metropolitan Police Service will have to implement ways of dealing with such individuals in order to avoid a repeat of the Viridi incident.

The inquiry also recommends that the Metropolitan Police Service should send the Metropolitan Police Authority progress reports on Sergeant Viridi when he returns to work. As a senior officer and in view of recent events ROTA believes that any progress reports should be undertaken in consultation with the Metropolitan Police Authority, the Metropolitan Police Service and Sergeant Viridi.

**In order to tackle institutional racism from within, the Metropolitan Police Service needs to take responsibility for its procedures and the attitude of individual staff before it can gain the confidence of Britain's ethnic minorities. Despite the publication of the inquiry we must remember that the Metropolitan Police Service has still not identified who sent the racist hate mail. Sergeant Viridi, who has had his professionalism questioned so publicly, has still not returned to work. Is another *sincere* apology really sufficient?**

#### About ROTA

Race On The Agenda is a policy development, information and research service for the Black<sup>1</sup> voluntary sector in London. We work towards the elimination of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and best practice.

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<sup>1</sup> ROTA uses the term Black to mean those people of African, Asian, Caribbean and South East Asian descent and other groups who are discriminated against on the grounds of their race, culture, colour, nationality or religious practices. We recognise that this definition may be problematic for some groups.