



Recognition, justice, and development for Black Canadians

Introduction

The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and other racialized Canadians (see Racial equality chapter), and the global mass movement for police reform in response to the police killing of George Floyd this June, have once more exposed deep-set social inequities in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere.

In Canada, the current lack of disaggregated race-based data in health, criminal justice, and employment has added to the crisis felt by Black communities. Informed decisions about how to address the impacts of the pandemic cannot be made without this information. Recent protests against police brutality have led Black Canadians and allies to demand programs, new initiatives, and reporting mechanisms to improve the socioeconomic and health outcomes of this demographic.

In January 2018, Canada officially recognized the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent (UNDPAD). Since that announcement, the government has promised to distribute approximately \$43 million over five years to various Black community-based projects aimed at addressing racism and discrimination. However, structural impediments within the bureaucracy have stalled that money in the system.

As a result, we have seen only nominal results on government commitments to Black Canadians over the past year. Under so-called normal conditions inaction was unacceptable. As the pandemic puts even

more strain on the socioeconomic situation faced by Black Canadians, it is needlessly reckless.

African diaspora communities from across Canada have called for action in the areas of disaggregated race-based data collection, justice and public safety, economic inclusion, and the federal public service. Achieving results in these areas will create the opportunity for real progress in support of the UNDPAD in Canada.

Toward a just recovery

On June 16, 2020, the Parliamentary Black Caucus issued a new statement challenging the government to move swiftly to address systemic inequality facing Black Canadians. “The reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic proves that governments can act quickly and ably in crisis,” it read. “Black Canadians are in a state of crisis: it is time to act. Words and symbolic gestures, while important, are not enough.”¹

Black and African diaspora Canadians of all backgrounds believe that Canada’s diversity is indeed a natural resource. The federal government has a responsibility to invest in this resource, which will in turn enrich the economic and social well-being of our country and all of its citizens. The following investments and political reforms will ensure that Black Canadians are not left behind during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 short-term response phase

The AFB Recovery Plan will:

- Accelerate the \$25 million Black Community Capacity Building funding to address sustainability in the Black community during the pandemic.
- Provide funds (including grants) to help Black businesses reopen.
- Extend and update the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) requirements to target Black businesses.
- Provide funding of at least \$5 million to help Black-owned businesses classified as essential services in their respective provinces (as of April 11, 2020) adapt to new demands and pressures stemming from COVID-19, including moving online.

Individual business grants of up to \$5,000 shall be made available.

- Provide \$5 million to national, regional, and local Black not-for-profit, charitable, and community organizations or their designated partner organizations across Canada to improve access to essential food for vulnerable Black Canadians.
- Extend the 75% wage subsidy for hiring, rehiring, and retaining on a full-time basis (30–40 hours/week) for Black Youth until March 31, 2022.
- Extend the UN Decade for People of African Descent to 2027 and call it the Canadian Decade.
- Include race as one of the variables in Statistics Canada’s publicly accessible database on COVID-19 cases to allow researchers to highlight trends within Black communities.

COVID-19 medium- and long-term recovery and rebuilding phases

The AFB Recovery Plan will:

Economic development

- Set a low-dollar, sole-source government procurement target for Black businesses, to be set at 20% in the first year and 4% in the second year.
- Establish a Black Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, modelled on the 2018 Women Entrepreneurship Fund, including National Business Community Hub seed funding for three years.
- Establish a foundation with \$20 million of matching funds to support diversity- and equity-seeking groups in skills and trades, entrepreneurship, and technology.
- Develop and resource a community child care and elder care plan to assist Black children and families.
- Leverage procurement dollars strategically to respond to inequalities generated in the labour market. This can be

done through social procurement and community benefits agreements (e.g., through infrastructure projects such as Eglinton Crosstown in Toronto), or by ensuring that tenders or requests for proposals favour bidders whose supply chains support Black-led organizations (e.g., nonprofit social enterprises or other nonprofits) or businesses.

Governance

- Create a UNDPAD Anti-Black Racism Secretariat within the Privy Council Office;
- Establish a prime minister’s advisory group (or champion) comprised of Black Canadians, reporting to Parliament for the rest of the UNDPAD and beyond;
- Appoint Black Canadians to senior portfolios in cabinet, within the senior civil service, and on boards, commissions, and agencies through positive measures;
- Appoint Black Canadians to the 17 judicial advisory committees responsible for evaluating candidates for federal judicial appointments;² and
- Appoint Black Canadian lawyers to the federal judiciary and the Supreme Court.

Health

- Declare anti-Black racism a national health crisis;
- Work with the provinces to ensure the allocation of protected funds to provide culturally appropriate health and well-being support within Black communities; and
- Collect data on African Canadian seniors: population, where they live, vulnerability, service needs, etc.

Justice

- Increase funding to legal aid across Canada to enhance access to justice for low-income racialized populations. This will include

resources for legal aid clinics, such as the Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC), with expertise and a focus on issues facing the community.

- Provide significant grant increases (not just micro grants) for programs supporting Black communities, with no age restrictions (e.g., youths only), within the justice system.
- Expunge all minor cannabis convictions.
- Expunge all other minor convictions for first-time offenders.
- Abolish mandatory minimum sentences.
- Mandate and adequately resource critical race theory (including Black and Indigenous history) courses in law schools through the Federation of Law Societies of Canada.
- Stop the RCMP from racial profiling and carding and encourage other police services to do the same.
- Work with provinces to enhance accountability infrastructure to address police brutality, police violence, and harms to Black communities.
- Resource community groups to help people who have been incarcerated serve sentences out of prison, based on restorative justice models.
- Grant parole eligibility after two years, not the current five.
- Review life sentences, which are getting longer and longer.
- Review prison disciplinary systems and allow access to legal aid and lawyers.
- Abolish solitary confinement in federal penitentiaries and encourage provinces to follow suit.

Capacity building

- Establish a fully resourced Black community information and communications infrastructure hub;

- Facilitate and fund the establishment of an education and policy network to support, Black education in the community (to offset the lack of education in the public school system), civic engagement, and policy knowledge for community educators, leaders, and organizations;
- Fund activities related to advocating for the equal representation of Black Canadians in Parliament, in provincial and territorial legislatures, and on municipal councils; and
- Establish and resource a public interest–based fellowship to advance research and scholarship on anti-Black racism and intersecting and systemic discrimination issues.

Diversity and inclusion

- Implement recommendations made to the International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy and Democracy to curb online misinformation and hate speech, including making Big Tech CEOs and company board members personally liable for content on their sites.

Monitoring and reporting

- Annual reporting to the Prime Minister’s Office and the Parliamentary Black Caucus on progress made in dismantling systemic barriers, current issues, and recommendations for resolutions including the work plan for the UNDPAD in Canada.

Immigration

- Investigate immigration practices that discriminate against people from Black and Brown countries and review the visa approval process; and
- Expedite a permanent residence process for Black refugees who are working as nurses and patient care attendants in the Canadian health system, especially those working in Quebec elderly homes.

Notes

1 Statement by the Parliamentary Black Caucus, June 16, 2020, taken from the website of Hull-Aylmer MP Greg Fergus: <https://gfergus.liberal.ca/mp-service/declaration-du-caucus-des-parlementaires-noirs/>

2 For a list of committees, see: <https://www.fja.gc.ca/appointments-nominations/committees-comites/index-eng.html>.