



## CONTENTS

- A note from the President Nigel Barriffe
- Project Updates
- Toronto Community Benefits Network
- Women and the Importance of Employment Insurance Reforms
- Addressing Anti-Black Racism is long overdue in Canada's Criminal Justice System
- Freedom from persecution for Muslim communities in Canada means freedom from the threat of violence
- Acknowledgments

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings on behalf of the Board and Staff at the Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR). We extend our deep gratitude to all our funders, supporters and members for their continued support of our mission to provide educational programs and research that address racism and discrimination in our society.

This past year's activities are too many to mention here but I am proud to share with you a taste of our 2016 milestones. UARR Board member Tam Goossen, a founding member of the Good Jobs for All Coalition and a member of the Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN), participated in successfully lobbying the Provincial government and Metrolinx to sign a community benefits agreement (CBA) on the Eglinton Crosstown LRT project. This agreement will see 10% of the apprenticeship working hours of that project dedicated to hiring youth from racialized communities.

We held our 41st Anniversary and 2016 Awards Dinner where the presentations of our keynote speakers Min Sook Lee and Desmond Cole described many years of anti-racism activism with relation to policing and labour rights. They laid a framework for all of us to continue the fight against Islamophobia, anti-black racism, discrimination against immigrants, and all forms of racism and prejudice in our society.

Marking the 2016 International Human Rights Day, UARR hosted over 200 guests at the panel we held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. Here, legal experts and human rights advocates discussed the impact of racial profiling on women of colour and gender diverse people.

UARR's project manager Dr. Siham Rayale continues our work on *The Roots Project*, a community program focusing on systemic discrimination including policing as it affects youth in the Somali and Tamil Canadian communities. Elsewhere in this newsletter, Dr. Rayale discusses the project in more depth.



Over the past year UARR has advocated on issues of Islamophobia, as well as religious profiling and discrimination against immigrants. Alongside the National Council of Canadian Muslims, students, teachers and parents in York Region, UARR called for the Province to review the York Region District School Board's (YRDSB) policies and procedures around race and equity. We supported a bill of rights for students, curricula that better represents world history including the histories of all York Region District School Board students, and an Ombudsman at the YRDSB to ensure that curricula and policy changes, and the student bill of rights are respected. In partnership with the Federation of Muslim Women, UARR supported an *Evening of Solidarity* which provided a space for healing and an opportunity for open conversation to end hatred that directed towards the Muslim community.

Finally, the UARR is excited to announce its partnership with *A Different Booklist Cultural Centre*. This new partnership will build on the legacy of the former bookstore that was an icon in the African-Canadian community. As described by Itah Sadu the centre "will be a non-profit hub, destination and space dedicated to the intellectual and cultural experience of people of African and Caribbean ancestry. It will be a place where invention and pioneering meet to create youth expression and intergenerational activity."

As always our sincere thanks to both our Administrator Yumei Lin and our project coordinator, Dr. Siham Rayale for their professionalism and commitment to the organization. Additionally, UARR is only as strong as its committed volunteer Board who meet monthly (sometimes more) and undertake event coordination in support of the organization's agenda and mission.

I would like to thank all of the Board for their continued dedication and time. In particular, I wish to express our deep appreciation to our outgoing Board members Oliver Walters and Sri-Guggan Sri-Skanda-Rajah. As one of our longest serving Board members, Sri has dedicated his life to social justice and the fight for a more just world. Oliver has been an important member of our organizing team for our awards dinners over many years. We thank both of them and wish them all the best in the future.

**Nigel Barriffe**  
**President of the Board**  
**Urban Alliance on Race Relations**  
**March 2017**

### PROJECT UPDATES: The Roots Project

With funding from the city of Toronto, Urban Alliance on Race Relations has embarked on a two-year project to address systemic issues in the Tamil and Somali community in Toronto.

The Roots Project has been designed to give voice to Somali and Tamil Canadians by bringing them together for intergenerational and intercultural dialogues regarding the following key systemic issues: identity, criminal justice, health, education and community engagement. These 5 areas will be explored by hosting a series of six dialogues with Somali and Tamil Canadian youth and elders in 2016 and three intercultural dialogues in 2017.

The dialogues will examine how past and present experiences have informed how these communities view their capacity to broaden civic engagement, navigate the justice system as well as improve education and health outcomes. The intent is to capture and build on knowledge lost between generations and develop set of community action plans that



## URBAN UPDATE - MARCH 2017

intersect many of these five key themes. In addition to the 5 key systemic issues, discussion on Poverty Reduction strategies will be incorporated. The project will conclude with a call to action summit this year. The dialogues this year will emphasize inter-generational dialogue along with intercultural exchange. To accomplish this, in 2017 we have partnered with a Tamil Seniors organization called 'Vasantham.' In our first dialogue workshop Somali and Tamil seniors and youth came together to discuss mental health, policing and community engagement. The workshop helped uncover two major themes in participants perceptions of policing and community engagement. These two themes were racial profiling and mental health from police officers. Many participants found that members of their community were frequent targets of racial profiling and experienced harassment on the part of the police that left them feeling alienated and criminalized. In addition, participants felt that the police officers, they interacted with are often insensitive and impulsive with their judgments, and aggressive with their actions in their demeanor. This problem was more pronounced with community members living with mental health concerns. Participants felt that police lacked both empathy and sensitivity when dealing with individuals with mental health concerns.

### Recommendations from 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop

- Recruiting police officers from racialized communities
- Increased training for police officers on mental health and how to engage with those that are living with it
- Greater cooperation between the Somali and Tamil community to develop strategies on policing, mental health and community engagement



Vasantham — A Tamil Wellness Centre

Seniors from both communities have had longer experiences with racial profiling than youth and stated that sustained organizing is necessary to tackle emerging issues. Seniors often highlighted the daunting task of integrating into Canadian society while engaging with racism and systemic barriers to economic wellbeing i.e., language training, mobility, cultural sensitivity.

The remaining workshops will continue to explore these themes and seek to summarize them into a plan of action statement. This statement, with various problems and solutions outlined, will be presented at a Plan of Action Summit following the workshops. This summit will seek to bring together youth, seniors and community organizers from across Toronto to discuss the five themes of the Roots Project but engage with emerging ones and galvanize around a plan of action statement. This statement is community-driven and will seek to meet the objectives of the Roots project –namely to give voice to community issues and experiences with systemic racism and barriers to inclusion.

**Dr. Siham Rayale, Project Coordinator**  
**Sahilaa Thevarajah, Outreach Coordinator**

### **Community Benefits Set to Create Hundreds of Local Jobs**

The Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) has successfully led an initiative to strike a deal between government, business, and labour to ensure 10 per cent of the work hours needed to complete Canada's largest transportation project will go to historically disadvantaged local community members. The \$5.3 billion Eglinton Crosstown rail line is expected to create around 300 positions in the area – and to set a precedent for using infrastructure projects to pump resources, skills training, and jobs into neighbourhoods that need it most.

For the past four years, TCBN has been calling for Community Benefits Agreements to be part of all infrastructure projects, and the Crosstown is the first large-scale initiative of its kind in Ontario. The idea is to use infrastructure projects that attract millions of dollars in spending more purposefully – to create solid employment and apprenticeship opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups. Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne has come out in support of the initiative and at the end of 2016 announced the agreed commitment to give 10 per cent of the Crosstown's work hours back to the local communities it will run through.



“All along this line, there are people who are having trouble getting into the workforce,” Ms Wynne said. “A project like the Crosstown LRT is a chance to change that. It’s a chance to provide those opportunities. Thanks to the work of Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario, the Toronto Community Benefits Network, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, and a whole range of others, working together, these partners have ensured that the Crosstown Build will mean good jobs for people from disadvantaged communities along the line.”

The TCBN's framework for Community Benefits Agreements targets employing and training people from low income neighbourhoods, including Neighbourhood Improvement Areas; urban Aboriginal populations; racialized and newcomer communities; people with disabilities as well as youth and women who have been historically disadvantaged.

At the TCBN we believe the agreement is just the beginning and the real challenge will be ensuring the initiative is successfully seen through to the end of the project. This will depend heavily on the government agencies, construction consortium, workforce development system and construction unions working cohesively together on the implementation.

We know that in Toronto more than half of all persons living in poverty are from racialized groups.. So, what we can say is that these communities have been historically disadvantaged on the job market in Toronto. This is exactly why our community benefits movement was developed in the first place.



In the long term, the aim of this initiative is to improve neighbourhoods and provide a lasting benefit to the communities where infrastructure investment is being made.

We are optimistic that this transit build will continue to stir economic activities in the neighbourhood. Commitment by all stakeholders to community benefits starting with this transit build will ensure that residents who get involved and take advantage of the opportunities will have the financial means to continue to live there and help build up their community.

**Rosemarie Powell, Executive Director  
Toronto Community Benefits Network**

**Women and The Importance of  
Employment Insurance Reforms**

A country with good labour market policies supports people when they're at work and when they're temporarily separated from that work. It means for example that Canada should ensure that the promised billions in government spending for rebuilding our physical and social infrastructure requires all public and private sector contractors to have employment equity plans. An 'equity lens' means ensuring you're doing the right thing at the front end, not just looking in the rearview mirror making assessments after the fact.

When it comes to women's economic security it will also mean access to affordable, quality child care – and a major reform of Employment Insurance. EI put \$7.7 Billion into the pockets of working women in 2015, providing them with greater security and independence, and the communities where they spend those dollars with greater economic stability. But EI could do so much more.

While there's some focus on women and EI Parental Benefits, the neglect of women's access to *Regular* Benefits has been shameful. Only 34.4% of unemployed females received EI Regular Benefits in December. For males, it was 48%, itself a poor showing compared with earlier decades. We must start paying more attention to making EI work for the millions of women employed in retail stores, restaurants, hotels, factories and health and education support services - the most numerous occupations in our job market.

**URBAN UPDATE - MARCH 2017**

Community and labour organizations in our Coalition along with the Inter-provincial EI Working Group are calling for various EI reforms. We put considerable focus on the urgent need to improve access and reshape EI Regular Benefits to better reflect modern job market realities. This will help men but it is women as well as new immigrants, young adults, racialized workers, aboriginal workers and those with disabilities who most often end up in the precarious, temporary, part-time, contract and temp agency work that now characterizes so much of the job market.

The government made a step in the right direction by eliminating the 910 hour entrance rule for New Entrants and Re-entrants, a rule that discriminated against women, new immigrants and young adults. It's a start, a downpayment on the EI "to do" list.

**EI Regular Benefits**

1. Lower entry requirements across Canada to 360 hours for a basic EI claim.
2. Revamp the EI Hours System now based on a 35 hour work week. The average weekly schedule for hourly paid employees is 30 hours. That itself masks a polarization between goods producing industries which average 38 hours and the service sector where most women work which averages 28 hours.

*If a Toronto grocery store cashier who works 25 hours weekly (the industry norm) was laid off in February - after working for 6 months straight - she wouldn't get a cent of EI benefits. That's wrong!*

3. Raise EI benefit rates, now 55% of normal earnings. Women's average EI benefit was only \$398 weekly in 2015 (for men it was \$457).
4. Introduce EI Training Income Benefits for the duration of approved training, all the more important when we face job transitions in a low carbon economy and continuing challenges with tech change and trade deal displacements.

**El Special Benefits**

- ◇ Another 8 weeks of use-it-or-lose-it benefit weeks for a second parent.
- ◇ Compassionate Care benefits when there's a critical illness.
- ◇ Restore pre-2013 Special Benefit access for all Temporary Foreign Workers who contribute premiums to EI.
- ◇ Extend the benefit period when parental leave follows a layoff for which Regular benefits were paid - and vice-versa, if a layoff follows parental leave.
- ◇ Extend EI sickness benefits initially to 26 weeks. Few women have workplace plans.

Summary of a February 21<sup>st</sup> presentation by **Laurell Ritchie, Co-Chair, El Working Group, Good Jobs for All Coalition**, to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women and its study of Women's Economic Security

**Addressing Anti-Black Racism is long overdue in Canada's Criminal Justice System**

After completing a week long fact-finding mission that included visits to Ottawa, Toronto, Halifax and Montreal earlier this month, a United Nations Working Group released a statement expressing "serious concerns about systemic anti-Black racism in the criminal justice system in Canada." In response, the Working Group recommended that Canada develop and adopt an African Canadian Justice Strategy.

The Working Group was no doubt responding to the dramatic over-representation of African Canadians in the criminal justice system, which dates back to at least the early 1990s, and which has only continued to accelerate since then. Today, African Canadians represent only 3% of the overall Canadian population, but 10% of the federal prison population. Racism, and not of some kind of supposed social, cultural or genetic disposition towards criminality is what has been identified by Canada's Correctional Investigator, Howard Sapers, as a primary root of this disparity.

Colour-blindness is not to blame for the absence of a strategy to address the over-representation of African Canadians in prison. Colour-blindness has not prevented the Canadian government from developing and adopting an Aboriginal Justice Strategy since 2002. Of course, this is not to say the histories and present realities of Indigenous and African Canadians are one and the same. They obviously are not.



However, only the truly ignorant and/or intellectually dishonest would deny that there are stark and alarming commonalities between Indigenous and Black experiences with the criminal justice system in Canada.

Indeed, there is no debating that from policing to prisons Indigenous and African Canadian lives are disproportionately targeted, torn and taken by agents and institutions of Canada's criminal justice system. This is taking place at similarly stunning rates.

While a national strategy is urgently needed to address what the UN Working Group has identified as "anti-Black racism in the criminal justice system in Canada", this strategy will only be successful if the provinces also do their part. In this vein, Ontario has the opportunity to lead the way.

In February 2016, the Ontario Government established the Anti-Racism Directorate under the leadership of Ontario's newly-minted Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism, Michael Coteau. The Directorate is currently completing nine province-wide community consultations to "engage with the public and organizations on addressing systemic racism and eliminating barriers for Indigenous and racialized communities."

While these consultations are still underway, it is almost certain that communities across the province will be consistent in identifying racism in the criminal justice system as one of the most pressing and persistent problems impeding the prospects of Indigenous and racialized Ontarians.

In light of this, the Directorate is no doubt going to be announcing some major justice-focused responses to systemic racism in Ontario in the near future. Whatever initiatives that the Directorate proposes, the success of these responses will be dependent on having current, comprehensive and credible race-based disaggregated data. The obvious problem with this is that no such data currently exists. As such, following its province-wide consultations, one of the Directorate's first order of business should be to work with relevant provincial and federal ministries in full partnership with racialized communities to re-constitute the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System.

The original Commission existed from 1992 to 1995. The 450-plus page report that the Commission published in December 1995, remains the most comprehensive report on the issue of systemic racism in Ontario's criminal justice system to date. Unlike any document before it or since, the report of the Commission uncovered racialized and particularly anti-Black disparities and disproportionalities at practically every level of the justice system.

It revealed that not only police and correctional officers, but also Crown prosecutors and even judges were implicated in perpetuating systemic racism in the criminal justice system. Using official government-collected data, the Commission uncovered disparate outcomes in the areas of police stops, charges, pre-trial detention, police use of lethal force, jury selections, conviction rates, severity of sentences, rates of incarceration, and more. With this report, at no point had Ontario been better positioned with the data needed to address racism in an area that can be considered a cornerstone of modern democracy.

However, Ontario lost a once in a generation opportunity to meaningfully rectify long-standing institutional criminal injustices after the Commission's report was shelved by a Conservative government that held power from 1995 to 2003. No subsequent government has sought to update or keep current the Commission's sweeping statistical findings.

Now, more than 20 years later, the Directorate has the chance to revive the Commission. Doing so will allow for the collection of data that will be critical for the development of an African Canadian Justice Strategy. It will also help to ensure that accurate data can be used to cure colourblind justice policy-making that for far too long has clouded our vision and compromised our capacity to realize a racially just Canada for all.

## URBAN UPDATE - MARCH 2017

Anthony Morgan is a lawyer at Falconers LLP and an advocate in the African Canadian community. Follow Anthony on Twitter @AnthonyNMorgan

Reprinted with permission from OPINARI: The Expert Blog. Original article published on October 26 2016 <https://opinarix.com/2016/10/26/addressing-anti-black-racism-is-long-overdue-in-canadas-criminal-justice-system/>

**Freedom from persecution for Muslim communities in Canada means freedom from the threat of violence**



“you broke the ocean in half to be here. only to meet nothing that wants you. – immigrant” - Nayyirah Waheed, salt.

Nayyirah Waheed's poetry in this time, speaks to me as a Muslim woman, living in Canada, of Somali descent. I am saddened and enraged at the hate-filled agenda of the new U.S. President and other political leaders who support him. While many of us who watched the U.S. Presidential race believed he would put legislation behind his violent thoughts, what happened in Quebec City shook me. The Cultural Centre of Quebec's Grand Mosque is like every Mosque in Canada. A space where many Muslims can be found bowing in prayer for up to five times each day.

Mosques/Masjids also work as community centres now and cater to the psychological, emotional and spiritual development of its congregation. These are spaces that are frequented every, single, day by thousands. The Quebec City terrorist attack shows that the threat of violence is no longer just that – a threat. That in this anti-Muslim narrative propagated by the U.S. President, we should just 'expect' violence. My heart grieves for those six Muslim men who lost their lives in today's attack.



**UARR 41st Anniversary and 2016 Awards Dinner**

Their families are enduring a sadness that I pray many of us never experience. I feel as I did after 9/11 – the suspicion that comes with openly demonstrating my faith; the implication that Muslim lives are expendable in Western nations and especially abroad. Muslims living in Libya, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen are targeted for being Muslim. This is an injustice that is legally indefensible, morally objectionable and violates the laws of human decency. Since 9/11 Muslim communities globally have had to defend their existence, apologize for their faith or cooperate with occupying military forces in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan under the threat of exposure for said cooperation. The legacy for this U.S. President to do as he did, was laid out by his predecessors and built on the rise of white supremacy in the U.S.

I feel emboldened to act though –encouraged by global demonstrations for equality like the Women’s March and the quick response by civil society, activists, lawyers and judges in the face of the travel ban on Muslims in the U.S. I also feel the need to connect –with justice advocates, truth seekers and decent human being’s who want to see and feel that we live in a country that wants justice for all.

Today as with everyday, I see that freedom from persecution for Muslim communities in Canada means freedom from the threat of violence – freedom for those that came before us as we continue to occupy their land, and freedom for Muslim countries that are currently experiencing war, conflict and widespread violence. At the moment when we should be welcoming immigrants/refugees from these seven countries, the bigoted laws now in place enshrine Islamophobia. That’s what happened in Quebec City, hatred emboldened by white supremacy saw an opportunity to act on it. So we should act too – with truth, defiance, demonstrations, and disobedience to reject these laws. I’m asking Canadian lawmakers to boldly and consistently condemn racism, misogyny, and Islamophobia and reject the willful dehumanization of Muslims in Canada and globally. Step up!

**Dr. Siham Rayale** is a researcher specializing in gender, conflict, peace, security and the Horn of Africa. As a consultant, Siham specializes in qualitative research methods, program design and evaluation. Follow her on Twitter: [@Srayale](https://twitter.com/Srayale)



**Media Award Winner:**  
**Nicholas Keung**



**Race Relations Award Winner:**  
**Yolanda McClean**



**Race Relations Award Winner:**  
**Roysen James**

**Keynote Speaker:**  
**Desmond Cole**



**Keynote Speaker:**  
**Min Sook Lee**



\*Pictures courtesy of Lumina Photography [luminaphotography.ca](http://luminaphotography.ca)

**A Word of Thanks:**

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- CUPE Local 4400
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