

Nigel Barriffe President of UARR

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

On behalf of the UARR Board, a heartfelt thanks to our funders, members, and community for their ongoing support.

Big shout out to Annesta Duodu, Joanne D'Souza, and Rebecca Amoah from ProBono Students of Canada, Osgoode Chapter. Your research on school resource officers, the role of the anti-racism secretariat in the 1990s and the current Anti-Racism Directorate, and UARR's involvement in law reform was well received and will be shared widely.

UARR and its coalition partners continue to pressure the CRTC to ensure that Rogers protects local ethnic programming. We requested that the CRTC carry out a public hearing with Rogers Media Inc. to investigates changes to ethnic news programming. Although the CRTC denied that request, we will continue our efforts.

We are pleased to announce our partnership with the Muslim Youth Fellowship. This Fellowship will assist youth to develop their political skills in collaboration with City Councillors. UARR Board member Mohammed Hashim shares more about this initiative within this newsletter.

With Ryerson Aboriginal Student Services, UARR marked the National Film Board's Canada 150 event by co-hosting a viewing of the film Trick of Treaty, a powerful film by Indigenous filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin that takes a critical look at how differently Canadian and Indigenous peoples interpret the treaty agreements that determine how we share this land.

Our partnership with A Different Booklist Cultural Centre (ADBCC) continues to grow. This year ADBCC opened the "Welcome to Blackhurst" exhibition, which showcases mixed-media works, including pamphlets from black-owned businesses as well as books by writers from the African and Caribbean diaspora.

UARR and its community supporters recently met with Yasir Nagvi, Attorney

General of Ontario, regarding Bill 175, the Safer Ontario Act. The Bill follows a comprehensive review of the two police oversight bodies, the SIU and the OIPRD. The review by Justice Tulloch recommends some important changes that are reflected in Bill 175. While we are pleased to see the Government taking this important step, we are concerned that the Bill also calls for a number of changes that were not recommended by the Tulloch review, that, if adopted, would put the very notion of independent oversight at risk. We will keep you abreast of the Government's response to our concerns.

In the coming year we are very excited about our partnership with Uniting Muslims and Allies for Humanity. Together we are presenting the #UnityTour, an events series across Canada to spark new friendships. Supported by Canadian Heritage, we seek to promote dialogue, enhance multiculturalism, and grow a strong and inclusive Canada. Join us in Ottawa (March 17), Calgary (March 24), and Toronto (May 27). You can register for free at www.umah.ca.

Many thanks to our Administrator Yumei Lin for all her energy, dedication, and hard work. We are also forever indebted to our project co-ordinator Dr. Siham Rayale as she moves onto a new journey. UARR relies heavily on its volunteer board not only for governance but also for organizing various activities. I would like to thank all of the Board for their continued dedication and time. In particular, we express deep appreciation to outgoing board members Sarah Grzincic, Tam Goossen, and Audi Dharmalingam. Both Tam and Dharma have been the foundation of the organization for many years. The UARR board will miss them dearly and we are grateful for the generous time and support they offered throughout their years of service.

Nigel Barriffe President of the Board Urban Alliance on Race Relations March 2018



URBAN UPDATE - MARCH 2018

PROJECT UPDATES: THE ROOTS PROJECT 2015-2017

With funding from the city of Toronto, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations completed The Roots Project, a two-year effort to address systemic issues in the Tamil and Somali communities in Toronto. The Roots Project was designed to amplify the voices of Somali and Tamil Canadians by bringing together youth and elders for a series of intergenerational and intercultural workshops that centered on identity, criminal justice, health, education, and community engagement. Throughout 2017 the workshops were completed as the Tamil and Somali communities came together to build cross-cultural solidarity.

Among the most interesting aspects uncovered in the workshops was that respondents from each community, Tamil and Somali, indicated that in many ways this was the first time they had a conversation regarding educational outcomes for youth, mental well-being, and racism with a member of the other group. Our partners, Positive Change TO and Vasantham, were exceptional in helping to facilitate this dialogue. These partnerships were vital to managing sensitive themes and topics that arose during the workshops, particularly those relating to each community's mental well-being and relationship to police. Many participants found that police engagement was lacking, or absent in their community. They felt that this lack of engagement led to a lack of awareness and increased indifference on the part of the police about the difficulties faced by racialized communities in Toronto. Others found the members of their community were frequent targets of racial profiling, experiencing harassment from police that left them feeling alienated and criminalized. In addition, participants felt that the police officers they interacted with were often insensitive and impulsive with their judgments, and aggressive with their actions and their demeanor. Participants felt that police were especially lacking in both empathy and sensitivity when dealing with community members with mental health concerns.

Mental health and well-being was a significant theme that arose throughout the discussions and intersected with other themes and topics. Whereas elders discussed mental health in light of trauma stemming from migration experiences, youth discussed mental health in terms of building intergenerational dialogue with their elders and engaging with their identities as Tamil-Canadian and Somali-Canadian youth. Identity was a theme that connected with youth and elders in



different and interesting ways. Elders discussed identity as fundamental to their capacity to integrate and build social networks among their communities, thus enabling them to endure the challenges of migrating to Canada from countries affected by conflict. Youth discussed identity in relation to negotiating their status as products of Canadian society and culture, and yet also being acutely aware of the impact their racial and ethnic identities have on their interactions with society and institutions in general. There was a clear divide between the way that elders and youth framed identity, mental wellbeing, and policing, and this divide led to a fruitful discussion during the Plan of Action Summit.

The Summit was the capstone event of the Roots Project. It involved community members from both communities to openly highlight the broader themes that were raised during the two years of the project. As well, one of the key objectives of the Summit was to challenge panel members to devise one solution that can be implemented to alleviate the central issues as they understand them. The summit took place on September 29, 2017, at the North York Civic Centre, with the following panel members: Faisal Hassan (Weston King Neighbourhood Centre); Parvathy Kanthasamy (Vasantham); Abi Jeyaratnam (education professional); Sajeeka Jeyakumar M.D. (psychiatrist and founder of TraumAssist); Haweiya Egeh (community volunteer and engagement professional); Jaafar Dirie (PhD Student, University of Toronto - Geography); and Mohamed Ismail (Social Planning Toronto). Our keynote speaker was Councillor Neethan Shan (Ward 2, Scarborough Rouge River). Our panelists drew on their experiences engaging with different themes and topics raised during the workshops of the Roots Project, but also highlighted that the intersectional impact of racism and exclusion by institutions can be personally debilitating for members of racialized communities.

The solutions our panelists presented were both interesting and intersectional. Faisal Hassan indicated that while intergenerational dialogue was foundational for fostering healthy communities, the legacy of trauma for elders fleeing from conflict-affected countries is still not adequately addressed. Parvathy echoed this sentiment by pointing to the numerous programs that Vasantham runs engaging with elder abuse and mental well-being. Solutions to bothissues included broadening access to culturally-

-competent mental health services for racialized communities, particularly elders who have experience with trauma. Abi Jeyaratnam's commentary was key to bridging youth discourses on mental well-being and identity with elders by indicating that while systemic racism is pervasive, the education system is among the worst offenders. Teachers routinely discriminate against parents who speak little English, and marginalize racialized youth by denying them equitable treatment and criteria for assessment. Youth cannot effectively perform as good students where their cultural background and identity is devalued and "othered." Training and other sensitivity programs were highlighted as important for employees and teachers of district school boards to address systemic racism in the education system, though more certainly needs to be done.

Our second panel engaged with themes of policing and mental well-being by addressing the more technical aspects of what exactly "mental illness" looks like. Dr. Sajeeka Jeyakumar spoke on the importance of recognizing mental illness and treating it through various means. Not all illnesses manifest in the same way and therapy is still a relatively new approach for the Tamil and Somali communities in general. This is where community-based initiatives can come in to bridge this gap in understanding. Our final three panelists, Haweiya Egeh, Jaafar Dirie, and Mohamed Ismail, emphasized that police engagement and relationship-building as well as greater engagement of Somali elders are likely to promote a sense of agency within the Somali community as it formulates its own solutions. Moreover, panelists emphasized the importance of cross-cultural collaboration and exchange of best practices.

Overall, the Plan of Action Summit concluded with panelists indicating that the solutions to the broad themes of the Roots Project include:

- Raising community voices through direct action \Rightarrow initiatives with institutions like the police and school boards
- Addressing the linkage between mental illness \Rightarrow or well-being and trauma as it affects elders
- Engaging youth to ensure that their voices are \Rightarrow given priority
- Ensuring that youth leadership is continually developed within each community
- Learning from past community engagement strategies to ensure that communities are not fatigued or over-leveraged

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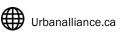
- Directly addressing police engagement with those suffering from mental illness
- Highlighting issues of access for elders as they \Rightarrow transition to care at home or in their engagement with health professionals
- Developing networks and linkages between racialized communities to continue to build crosscultural solidarity!

Dr. Siham Rayale, Project Coordinator Sahilaa Thevarajah, Outreach Coordinator **Urban Alliance on Race Relations**





The Roots Summit (left to right): Sahilaa Thevarajah, Siham Rayale, Neethan Shan and Tam Goossen





THE SRO PROGRAM: UARR'S POSITION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The debate about the use of School Resource Officers has once again been re-opened as a result of a new report from Carleton University. As before, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations continues to support the dissolution of the SRO program. Let us explain why, first by quoting from respected sources; second, by examining the genesis of the SRO program; and third, by elaborating on some of its impacts.

Two quotes from the 2008 Review of the Roots of Violence Report presented by Justice Roy McMurtry & Dr. Alvin Curling are extremely telling. They state that they "were taken aback by the extent to which racism is alive and well and wreaking its deeply harmful effects on Ontarians," and that they believed "that well-trained and properly paid youth workers can play critical roles in bridging youth, schools and communities."

In their well-researched and thoughtful analysis, they advocated against the presence of police officers in schools, because of "a wide consensus in the community that the safe schools provisions have had a disproportionate impact on racialized students."

On our next point regarding the SRO program. This program began in the US in the early 1950s at a time when racism was rife and the KKK flourished. It was enforced in many schools located in districts that were classified as poor and where a large percentage of children came from Black households. It was developed in response to the perception that these communities had a greater number of so-called "delinquent" children.

In this program the word "resource" stands out. A resource is a source of support or supply. A police officer's first duty is to enforce the law. A police officer is not a source of support like a social worker or a guidance counsellor and should not be expected to act as one. It is not the role of an SRO to deal with the

myriad of complex issues that racialized and marginalized youth face. That is the work of trained and skilled professionals. The SRO program is a stopgap substitute. What these youth need are more social workers and more guidance counselors, not criminalization.

In regards to some impacts on youth, put yourself in the place of a young child whose family has emigrated from a conflict zone or a war-torn country. Imagine the fear and confusion this child experiences when they are confronted by a uniformed SRO. For many this conjures the images of violence and terror they encountered in their home country. Add to this the element of opposing cultures, language barriers, religious beliefs, physical appearance, and so forth, and we have a situation ripe for misinterpretation. The result is criminalization of Black or racialized youth.

Poor, marginalized, or racialized youth are more likely to be labeled disruptive and their behaviour criminalized, while their peers are more often diagnosed and treated for physical or mental health issues. A child with a few suspensions often ends up as "known" to police. This further stigmatizes them. Societal perceptions about Black and racialized groups categorize, stigmatize, ostracize and ultimately criminalize the children.

In conclusion, UARR strongly urges the dissolution of this program. We urge school board trustees to direct resources to providing more social workers, guidance counsellors, and youth workers, and anti-racism training for its staff so that students from Black and otherwise racialized communities can realize and share their full potential.

Malika Mendez Vice President of the Board Urban Alliance on Race Relations

Quick Facts

- In 2008 uniformed police offers were placed in select public high schools around the city; this soon evolved into the SRO program.
- Since its inception, the SRO program has faced allegations of racism and discrimination by community members and organizations.
- In November 2017 Toronto District School Board (TDSB) trustees voted 18-3 to cancel the SRO program (1 didn't vote).
- The SRO program continues at Toronto's Catholic schools.

WHAT TRUDEAU'S NEXT STEP TOWARD FIGHTING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION MUST BE

With the new Parliamentary report now shining a new light on the 2005 Action Plan, Canada should seize this opportunity to acknowledge systemic racism, to introduce a revitalized action plan, and implement measures that will lead to real and substantive change

On January 30, 2018, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Canada will officially recognize the International Decade for People of African Descent.

This groundbreaking acknowledgement came as a result of years of lobbying by African Canadian communities and their supporters. It was also recommended by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to Canada in its 2017 concluding observations.

In addition, Trudeau promised "to build a better, more inclusive country that recognizes the contributions of all, and creates better opportunities for more Canadians." This, he pledged, would be done through "improving research and data collection to better understand the particular challenges" faced by Canadians of African descent.

This announcement should be celebrated, not just by African Canadians, but by all Canadians who want to see anti-Black racism and racism against other racialized groups eliminated.

Just days after, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage released a report, Taking Action against Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination Including Islamophobia. In contrast to the prime minister's announcement, the committee report received hardly any media coverage. Yet if

adopted, the report will have far greater impact than the symbolic, albeit significant, gesture by Trudeau.

Among other things, the report calls on Canadian to update and reinstate the previous Canadian Action Plan against Racism, and broaden it to include religious discrimination, including Islamophobia.

It pushes the government to complete the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and comply with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. It also urges Canada to set measurable targets to ensure such a plan is sustainable and accountable, and to collect disaggregated data to monitor the impact of policies to eliminate racial inequality and the racialization of poverty. Similar to the call to proclaim the Decade for People of African Descent, many of these recommendations echo the UN CERD's observations about Canada.

The standing committee's report could not have come at a better time.

Opinion by Avvy Go, Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic; Debbie Douglas, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants; Shalini Konanur, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. Click here to read the original article published in the Toronto Start Feb. 7, 2018.

THERE CAN BE NO RECONCILIATION AS LONG AS INDIGENOUS LIVES ARE EXPENDABLE

The absence of justice for Tina Fontaine and Colten Boushie has interrupted the rhetoric of reconciliation.

Unspeakable rage. That's what I, and Indigenous youth across the country, felt when the jury delivered a not guilty verdict in the case of Gerald Stanley, who killed 22-year-old Colten Boushie.

Then we felt unspeakable sadness for the verdict that allowed 15-year-old Tina Fontaine, whose body was weighted down with rocks and thrown into a river, to go without justice.

Canada has shown, twice within the last month, that Indigenous youth cannot expect a reasonable level of justice. We cannot expect that justice is blind, that juries are capable of rendering it.

Canadian complacency is shown in the continued colonialism that cannot be hidden. These two verdicts are just the latest iterations of it.

Indigenous communities have endured these two cases, back to back, wishing for justice but knowing that raised expectations could lead to a shattering disappointment. As expected, they have left devastation.

Through the verdicts in these two trials, Canada has clearly reinforced feelings of hopelessness. These decisions show young Indigenous people, the fastest-growing demographic in the country, that their lives simply aren't valued as much as those of other Canadians.

What's worse is all that came after the verdicts. Canadians flooded comment sections and social media, and told Indigenous youth that this is justice. "Colten Boushie shouldn't have been in Gerald Stanley's yard."

"Tina Fontaine was a teen looking for trouble, and she found it."

These statements show that Canada is not the caricature of politeness, justice, and virtue that it wants so desperately to believe it is.

Our justice system is anything but just. Our neighbours blame children for their own violent deaths.

These verdicts have interrupted the rhetoric of reconciliation, only to reveal that we aren't as far along as we might like to think. A reminder that restoring the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth was going to take more than conferences, reports, and words.

Indigenous youth suicide rates are staggering compared to Canadian youth, between 6 and 40 times the national average.

Read that again; allow it to sink in.

The vast majority of Canadians reading this now have heard the dire statistics about Indigenous youth, shrugged, and closed their eyes to it.

A civilized nation would see this hopelessness in youth as a clear sign that things aren't working the way they should, an emergency that must be dealt with urgently. It would see through a lens that connects dots of injustice to the systems that exist. It would ask questions about how institutions might be responsible for these devastating statistics.

But what does Canada do? Reinforces the idea that young Indigenous lives are not valued.

Reconciliation has to mean that Canada acknowledges that its treatment of Indigenous peoples has been unacceptable.

But these verdicts, and the following public discourse, have clearly shown Indigenous youth over the past weeks that Canada hasn't changed.

Canada is akin to the abusive partner, expecting Indigenous youth to continually forgive its bad behaviour, to reconcile, forgive the violence inflicted on their bodies.

This is a message to Canada: young people will not reconcile with a reality where our lives are expendable.

Young people will not reconcile with a nation that continually fails us.

Young people will not reconcile without seeing colonial systems dismantled and replaced with ones that purposely seek justice for Indigenous young people. To every Indigenous youth I say: I value your life, you come from proud people, you are loved.

To Canada I say: witness this, you have an unjust nation.

To Canada I say: your systems have failed us. Help us to build new ones.

But for now, Canada, witness us, a nation unreconciled.

Justice for Tina Fontaine, justice for Colten Boushie, justice for all Indigenous youth.

Max FineDay leads <u>Canadian Roots Exchange</u>, a national non-profit that works with youth to advance reconciliation, and sits as a member of the interim National Council on Reconciliation. Click here to read the original article <u>published</u> in the Toronto Star Feb. 23, 2018

THE MUSLIM YOUTH FELLOWSHIP: A REFLECTION ON OUR FIRST TERM

Before we know it, we are already approaching the end of the very first term of the Muslim Youth Fellowship (MYF). The MYF is the first of its kind in Canada to provide young Muslim students and recent graduates with employment opportunities in City Councillors' offices for a term of twelve weeks. Fellows work from eight to twelve hours per week in a wide variety of areas including research, policy, communications, casework, community consultations, events, campaign organizing, and government relations. Placements are complemented with intensive training and development workshops on topics including communications, advocacy, election canvassing, and political organizing with high-profile Muslim as well as non-Muslim political operatives across parties, levels of government, and sectors.

The MYF was established with the aims of providing a platform to support greater Muslim youth participation in the democratic system, increase civic engagement, and deepen the political maturity of the Canadian Muslim community. The program is run by us at the *Urban Alliance on Race Relations* in partnership with *Dawanet* and has been sponsored by the *Atkinson Foundation*, the *Laidlaw Foundation*, *Fasting 5K*, and the *City of Toronto*.

Though the program has been in development for over two years, the MYF was first publicized in June 2017 on our website, on Muslim community newsletters and social media pages, and through word of mouth among community members. Because the MYF fills a large void in Muslim youth mentorship

and civic engagement, awareness of the MYF spread incredibly quickly throughout diverse Musspread lim communities across Canada.

As part of a highly competitive recruiting process, we received 60 applications from all over Canada. Thirteen highly distinguished fellows from diverse professional, political, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds with wide multisector experience were screened, interviewed, and carefully selected. The MYF stands as a strong advocate against anti-Blackness in the Muslim community, making the diverse representation and inclusion of Black Muslim Canadian fellows a high priority.

"I want to have a say in what my community looks like, what my country looks like," said Amina Mohammed in a recent Toronto Star article before the launch of the MYF. This article is among several glowing examples of positive coverage through newspaper, television, and radio interviews in the Toronto Star, CP24, and CBC News about the Muslim Youth Fellowship.

Of course, positive coverage has also been accompanied by racist backlash from right-wing media personalities like Ezra Levant and Pamela Geller. This Islamophobic violence against the MYF only further fuels our drive to increase civic engagement and deepen the political maturity required in our Canadian Muslim community in order to tackle the escalating anti-Muslim racism in Canada.

The MYF's model at Toronto City Hall has been the object of study and inspiration for our counterparts in British Columbia at the provincial level as well as *The Canadian Muslim Vote* to develop their own programs to increase Muslim youth political engagement. Insha Allah, with your continued *du'aa* and support, we can look to further strengthen the well-being, prosperity, and opportunities for Muslim youth in our community.

Mohammed Hashim
Executive Director of MYF and
UARR Board of Director

UNITY TOUR

Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR) is pleased to be partnering with Uniting Muslims and Allies for Humanity (UMAH) to launch the Unity Tour!

Funded by Canadian Heritage, the project aims to promote dialogue, enhance multiculturalism, and grow a strong and inclusive Canada by building bridges and sparking new friendships. The tour is a series of 3 events which will be hosted in Ottawa (March 17), Calgary (March 27) and Toronto (May 27).

The first two events will be titled "Nights of Empowerment" where Muslims and Allies participate on a panel discussion regarding their personal experiences and, in particular, the impact of discrimination and Islamophobia on their lives. The final event will take place in Ramadan as the Unity iftar (breaking fast) dinner in partnership with the El-Tawhid Juma Circle at the 519 Community Centre.

Together UARR and UMAH strive to create spaces for courageous conversations that challenge prejudice and misconceptions. This effort is also supported by the Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals (CAMP), the Muslim Students Association of Canada (MSA-AÉM), and the Own It Institute of Canada www.ownitcanada.org. For more information visit www.urbanalliance.ca/umah

Farheen Khan Writer, Consultant, Coach, Advocate & TV Host







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A WORD OF THANKS:

THE URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS WISHES TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THANK THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF:

> Atkinson Foundation Canadian Heritage **City of Toronto Laidlaw Foundation**

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We welcome your comments and input







