

Deputation to Policy & Finance Committee

February 17, 2003

By:

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

The issues facing the City are critical and urgent, for example:

- Racialization of poverty at a time when there has been a three-fold increase in the proportion of visible minority population in Canada since 1981 (2001 Census Data);
- Increasing racial profiling & criminalization of ethno-racial communities in Toronto at a time when 43% of all newcomers coming to Canada choose Toronto as a home;
- A serious lack of involvement and feeling of disenfranchisement of the majority of the population of the metropolis in matters of governance due to lack of meaningful avenues for participation;
- A growing sense of cynicism among City's residents in matters of accountability of elected officials to the growing and obvious needs of the diverse communities of Toronto; and
- A subsequent lack of correlation between City's budget priorities and what appear to be the obvious needs of its residents.

These factors are resulting in:

- Worsening inequities particularly of vulnerable communities that are receiving fewer resources and have been hardest hit by funding cuts (e.g. new immigrants and refugees, ethno-cultural and racial minorities etc.);
- Lack of service infrastructure for less established, newer, and smaller communities and community agencies who are responding to a demonstrated need in their community but are struggling and are continually at risk in an environment of increased needs and reduced resources;
- Lack of resources to establish new community supports desperately required in many isolated and under-served communities and areas of the city that have limited service delivery capacity at this time;

Furthermore, "...demographic data shows that with current mobility trends, racialised groups will soon form economically disadvantaged majorities in some of Canada's major urban centres" (G-E. Galabuzi, Canada's Creeping Economic Apartheid, 2001, p 7) which is becoming apparent in Toronto.

CASSA is an umbrella organization of approximately sixty agencies, groups and individuals serving the South Asian community in the Greater Toronto Area. **Today South Asians make up the second largest visible minority in Canada (3.1%) and 23% of all visible minority population. They represent 4.9% of Ontario's population (i.e. 554,900). According to 2001 Census, South Asians constitute the largest visible minority community in Toronto today and the fastest growing community. 1991-2001 South Asian population has doubled from 235,500 to 473,800, i.e. 28% of all Toronto's visible minorities. It is important to note that at least 29% of all South Asians are Canadian born.**

However, the community continues to face socio-economic challenges that go beyond issues of settlement of immigrants but rather point to **persistent** underdevelopment of the community irrespective of their time of arrival in Canada.

The growing economic and social marginalization of the South Asian community has been further exacerbated by persistent instances of racial profiling and indiscriminate and often criminal “backlash” against the community in the last two years. Canadian South Asians have had their mobility rights circumscribed by discriminatory and racist attacks in public places like public transit, airports etc., their right to dissent taken away by fear of racial profiling and criminalization under the guise of heightened security, their right to practice their religion threatened by acts of vandalism and hate crime, their right to assert their cultural heritage undermined by negative and racist portrayal in public discourse.

At a time like this when large numbers of residents of Toronto are feeling isolated, targeted and threatened, it is important that the City act in a pro-active manner and with a clear mandate to create a society that is free of racism and discrimination. **This can only be achieved if the City establishes clear policy directions for addressing these issues and then makes commensurate investment in the community based human and social infrastructure for that purpose.** The partnership between the City and the Not-for-Profit Community-Based Sector through the grants programs is one such critical and strategic mechanism through which the City does and should continue to implement its policy directions.

Thus, we recommend that:

- ▷ **Council declare equity and anti-racism to be the cornerstone of all its policies, programmes and structures of governance**
- ▷ **Council recognize that well-resourced and stable physical and social infrastructure are critical components of any Urban Development Strategy**
- ▷ **Council demonstrate its commitment to these by investing commensurate long-term and stable resources fulfilling the objectives of these policy directions**
- ▷ **City Council present a yearly audit of its own budget process through a transparent and clear mechanism to show the correlation between financial allocations and scope of community needs**
- ▷ **Council establish meaningful and accountable mechanisms for the residents of the City to participate in Council deliberations and be able to hold their elected officials accountable throughout their term in office**
- ▷ **Last but not least, we support the Toronto City Summit Alliance and TorontoCan’s recommendation for the Council to pass a motion supporting the need for a tripartite agreement between the Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments for a new deal for the Cities.**