



Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

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Solidarity Statement

June 25, 2020

Over the past months and for many years, our communities have grieved the loss of lives of people of colour as a result of structural violence and the unfair treatment perpetuated against racialized communities, especially against Black and Indigenous communities. The recent killing of Black community members such of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and most recently Rayshard Brooks in the United States are among hundreds of individuals killed by structural violence. Canada is not immune to police brutality against Black, Brown and Indigenous communities as we have seen lives lost here including most recently Ejaz Chaudhry in Mississauga, Chantel Moore in Edmundston, Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto, D'Andre Campbell in Brampton, Abdirahman Abdi in Ottawa and Andrew Loku in Toronto. It is a wake up call to a harsh reality that all lives are not valued equally; that racism and oppression continues to thrive in all levels of society; that authorities are an endangerment to the very communities they had sworn to protect; and above all, that we need to act now. It is time now that we stand united against the pervasive violence Black communities, Indigenous communities and communities of colour have been subjected to for far too long. Without hesitation, we acknowledge that inequities exist within our society.

The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) is a social justice organization that envisions and strives for an equitable Canada free of all forms of discrimination, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, Islamophobia, and ableist and gender-based discrimination, where everyone is fully empowered and safe to participate in and contribute to Canada's political, economic, social and cultural well-being. As with many others, our hearts have been heavy from the injustices we've seen and continue to see. As an organization, we have taken time to reflect on the implications of these events on our role and our privilege as a social justice organization and as an umbrella agency representing the South Asian communities, reinforcing our continued commitment and responsibilities to address systemic racism in Canada. We recognize the impact of systemic racism and oppression by settler colonialism founded on white supremacy, specifically the structural violence to which Black and Indigenous communities have been subjected for centuries.

We also recognize our own complicity in systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism within the South Asian communities. Through our collective history of colonialism, South Asian cultures (in all its various forms) have internalized concepts of shadeism and colorism and this socialized bias for lighter skin has been a cause for oppression even within our own communities. In our communities' experience in Canada, we see that this internalized skin-colour narrative impacts how our community relates to other groups of colour, particularly Black and Indigenous communities.

We recognize how structural racism divides and hierarchizes racialized communities. Based on our proximity to Whiteness, Canada has come to expect 'model minority' South Asians in Canada to fill vital socio-economic positions as doctors, engineers, computer scientists, accountants, and lawyers. Fueled by the myth that it is simply our hard work and aptitude that provide us with opportunities for social mobility in Canada, our collective buy-in to the "model minority" position assumes that other communities who have "not made it" must not



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be working hard enough. In doing so, we corroborate and legitimize the myth of racial difference between Brown, Black and Indigenous communities. These myths do not account for the larger structural racism that disproportionately negatively impacts Black and Indigenous communities, including the history of colonization, slavery and segregation and the oppression they continue to experience today interacting with institutions and actors in law enforcement, social services, community infrastructure, health services and other aspects of society.

Recognizing the challenges racialized communities face in Canada, the resulting disproportionate harm on Black and Indigenous communities, and our own internalized perceptions around racism, CASSA pledges to deepen our efforts to actively support dismantling of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in the broader Canadian context and address it within our own communities. We pledge to continue and expand our work to challenge oppressive and racist frameworks through education, advocacy and action. CASSA is committed to learning and unlearning, and working towards forming alliances with community members and organizations dedicated to addressing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in all its forms.

To address the challenges that exist within our communities, CASSA will:

- Engage South Asian communities in difficult and uncomfortable conversations about white supremacy, brown complicity, solidarity, and allyship through our weekly virtual [Anti-Hate Conversation Series](#).
- Continue our participation and engagement with racialized communities that work on advancing anti-discrimination, anti-racism and anti-oppressive frameworks and strategies, such as advocating for more investments in a coordinated federal Anti-Racism Strategy and a provincial Anti-Racism Directorate in Ontario with actionable goals and measurable outcomes.
- Advocate for significant reduction of police funding and reallocation of resources and funding towards community-informed and community-lead mental health and well-being strategies for Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities.
- Use our forums for discussion with our membership and South Asian communities to educate, discuss, and unlearn anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism within the broader South Asian communities. We will also support our member agencies in building capacity to address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in their organizations.
- Deepen our relationships, coalitions, and understanding with Black-led and Black-focused organizations and continued work on Health Equity, Anti-Hate, and addressing issues of systemic racism in collaboration with the [Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change Steering Committee](#).
- Recognize and use our privilege as an opportunity to amplify advocacy for Black and Indigenous equity and challenge and dismantle the social and political structures that contribute to structural violence.

CASSA stands in solidarity with Black and Indigenous brothers and sisters in the fight for a fair and just Canada. We invite you to join us in our collective efforts and hold us accountable.

In Solidarity,

Sanga Achakzai, Chair of the Board

Samya Hasan, Executive Director

Board of Directors: Anjum Sultana, Leanne Saldanha, Tanzina Islam, Anita Singh