

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Statement Against Racial Injustice

**Brampton, ON, June 7, 2020:** Will May 25, 2020, be recorded in history books as a turning point for the dismantling of anti-Black racism? Will the brutal death of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of the people who have sworn to protect, be the catalyst that drives home the fact that Black Lives Matter the same as other lives?

The callousness of George Floyd's killing has shocked this continent, the world but, unfortunately, it isn't shocking to the Black community. We have heard and been speaking out against such atrocities for decades but our pleas went unheeded – they were brushed aside until this tragedy was captured on video and thrust in the faces of viewers.



While we grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, it has magnified the racism pandemic. If the majority of people around the world weren't forced to stay at home, were able to go to work, to shop, go to the cinema or a sporting event, the tragic death of Floyd may have been overlooked and become another news item, just like the others before him.

However, there is not much for people to do so they tuned into cable and watch the horror of a man's life being drained from his body due to a knee pressed into his neck, to hear him say over and over again "I can't breathe" while police officers ignored his cries for help.

All we are asking is for you to take your knee off the necks of Black people and let us breathe. Give us the dignity we deserve and accord us the same rights as anyone else. And we also include the Indigenous communities which suffer the same fate as Black communities.

As the groundswell of protests and calls for justice are reverberating around the world, people are waking up and facing the inherent prejudices (not unconscious biases) that have given lie to the belief that Black people are lesser than human, that they are inferior to other racial groups.

Some Canadians deceive themselves that there is no or very little racism in Canada. While it may not be as overt in Canada as it is in US, the trauma on Black people here is just as catastrophic. We live with the pain, fear and danger of racism daily.

In 2018, the Canadian Public Health Association released a position statement acknowledging that racism is a public health issue. That same year, a study released by the Ontario Human Rights Commission found that Black people are 20 times more likely to be injured or killed by police than their counterparts. Overall, Black people are more likely to face lethal force, it stated.

We, at Roots Community Services, a Black-led, Black-focused organization, stand in solidarity with other agencies and individuals calling for the eradication of anti-Black racism and to the dismantling of institutional systems that continue to oppress us. We need to see radical changes at all levels of government, educational institutions, the police and healthcare systems, those bodies that have control over our lives and the way we are treated.

We demand that:

- More than lip-service be paid to anti-racism and that policies are informed by those who are most affected.
- Elected officials be held accountable for ensuring incidents of racism are dealt with efficiently, effectively and transparently, and there is a clear and positive outcome of these incidents.
- Funding should be appropriately channelled to organizations that can make a difference and help eradicate systemic racism, especially anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, from within our communities. Mainstream organizations should not be lead agencies for funding that is directed to these communities. They can work along with the Black-led organizations, providing support and advice but they should not be receiving the funds and determining what programs should be delivered to these communities. Not for us without us!
- The various police services should be mandated to spend a percentage of their budget on programs in partnership with grassroots organizations from within communities they deem to need heavy policing.
- Educational and healthcare systems learn and exercise cultural humility in their practices to ensure that they improve and not harm those who come to them for service.

Many people believe that this time, there will be change. That the lives unfairly ended, such as George Floyd and (closer to home in Brampton) Andre Campbell, won't be in vain. That people won't be distracted from the cause when their world reopens. If the knees can be taken from our necks and people of all races make a conscious effort to check themselves and confront racism when they see it, then maybe, maybe, positive change will come.

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