



John Tory
Mayor

An open letter to Toronto's business community on anti-Black racism

In recent weeks, I have seen the ongoing and massive outpouring of grief, pain and frustration that have led tens of thousands to peacefully take to our own streets calling for an end to anti-Black racism – and racism against Indigenous peoples and racialized communities – in all of its forms. We have all heard the calls to eradicate the social conditions that threaten the equal rights, justice and well-being that Black communities are just as entitled to enjoy as anyone else.

In 2016, the Black Lives Matter Toronto movement confronted us with the dire reality of anti-Black racism within our city's organizations and institutions. It pushed and inspired us at City Hall to commit to doing everything in our power to support real change for Toronto's Black communities, including launching North America's first Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, led by our Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Unit in 2018.

Now, in 2020, we are once again faced with a pivotal moment, but this time with a heightened sense of urgency, not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the general sentiment of fatigue, pain, frustration and anger that Toronto's Black communities are experiencing, and rightfully so.

We cannot allow for this moment to be left as just that; a moment. We must work together to implement long-lasting and meaningful changes. This is a turning point for all of us – myself included as Mayor of the City – to not just do better, but to do right.

The circumstances we are now facing as a City call for the same ingenuity and creativity that has been demonstrated by all levels of government and the broader community, private and not-for-profit sectors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Black racism, as a centuries-old social pandemic, requires the same focus, swiftness and resolve and that means taking concerted action, insisting on accountability and achieving justice, all of which are long overdue.

At City Hall, we are working with our Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit and all City Divisions to implement ways we can better support Toronto's Black residents, businesses and community organizations.

We've committed to supporting the establishment and growth of Black owned businesses in Toronto by helping Black businesses supply more goods and services to the City. We've strengthened our commitment to only support larger business organizations that are reflective of the diversity of this City in their governance, and that our support for smaller organizations is also reflective of the diversity of Toronto.

We're ensuring there's a focus on Black-owned businesses with the City's business support programs, such as the City's Digital Main Street and ShopHERE programs, are working with our City-supported incubators to deepen relationships with Black entrepreneurs, and are committing to focusing on inclusive economic growth in key neighbourhoods.

We're increasing our focus on workforce development, including the training, hiring and retaining of Black employees with help from our Black Staff Network. We're also partnering with community-based organizations focused on Black talent employment and training and developing a plan to build leadership pipelines for Black staff. I have learned from listening to them that there are a considerable number of Toronto's Black public servants who feel isolated, silenced, unseen and unsupported as City of Toronto employees. This is unacceptable and I am determined to do whatever I can to shift the culture of fear and worry that I have learned has set in among too many who serve our city.

I know that there's still so much more to be done. But I think we're moving in the right direction.

My commitment is to being impactful and not performative in this moment and I am calling on Toronto's civic, political and Toronto's business leaders to do the same.

We all can do much better. Corporations have made missteps, by omission or commission, and even with the best of intentions have fallen short of taking courageous and concrete actions to make Black lives matter at every level of your organization. It's an uncomfortable reality that we all have to reckon with at this moment.

So, today, I am calling on Toronto's business community to show the kind of leadership this moment demands, and the required attention this moment warrants. I am calling on you to take concerted action to end anti-Black racism – and racism against Indigenous peoples and all racialized communities – within all ranks of your organization. Make meaningful and long-lasting changes by holding yourselves accountable and being transparent with your shareholders, employees, customers and clients.

Some leaders within Toronto's business community have already started to step up during this moment. The Canadian Council of Business Leaders Against Anti-Black Systemic Racism, recently formed by Wes Hall, Victor Dodig, and Prem Watsa, launched the BlackNorth Initiative to increase the representation of Black professionals in boardrooms, executive suites and, I hope, at all levels in the workplace across Canada. While it will be outcomes that actually improve the well-being and propel the prospects of Black workers and professionals that will matter most, this initiative is promising and one I support.

Beyond this initiative I am calling on each and every business in Toronto to put in place a plan to address anti-Black racism and to help eradicate it. There are plenty of resources available to help you prepare and implement such a plan, or, if you have one, to update it and to accelerate the pace of reform. We just can't afford as a City to have anyone sit this one out.

Doing better so that you can do what's right doesn't require doing things perfectly. It requires commitment, humility, consistency, and accepting the criticism where and when it's deserved. Most of all, it requires leadership.

Together, as a City we must face the need to rid our society of anti-Black racism. This is our collective duty. We all can do better by Black communities. Now's the time to turn that truth into real action, not just for now, but for the foreseeable future. Our collective well-being and decency depend on it.

Thank you for your much needed leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Tory". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Mayor John Tory