



FAST TALK ON ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN CANADA

Summary Report

FEBRUARY 16, 2023

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Executive Summary

“Mother Earth should have rights because we need mother earth. There’s a saying if all the animals were taken, we wouldn’t survive. If the fish were taken, we wouldn’t survive. If the flyers and the swimmers and the plants and the trees were taken we wouldn’t survive. But if all human beings were taken from the earth, the earth would survive.” – Expert participant

On February 16, 2023, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) hosted a Fast Talk on Environmental Racism. A “Fast Talk” is a mini-roundtable consultation on a particular issue that in this instance brought together a panel of five experts with knowledge in the area of environmental racism as activists, advocates, academics, and people with lived experience.

The experts raised a number of points about the interconnected nature of the impacts and issues resulting from environmental racism. Some areas that were discussed included the impacts of colonialism, societal standards, systems of power, health impacts, the human right to adequate housing, Indigenous knowledge, the legal system, data collection, and climate change.

The experts noted that environmental racism is a direct by-product of colonialism. They communicated that the continuation of colonial practices negatively affects Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities to this day. Collectively, numerous experts stated that as a society, Canada has normalized a lesser standard of living for socioeconomically disadvantaged and racialized communities. Numerous stories were shared regarding how these societal standards have led to situations of environmental racism, which negatively impact affected communities.

The experts stressed that while environmental racism does impact the human right to adequate housing, it goes well beyond just houses and structures. Communities living in situations of environmental racism are also disproportionately impacted by high rates of chronic illnesses and deaths. The experts explained how ongoing stress and disruptions to communities and ways of living result in serious spiritual, cultural and mental health impacts. Some experts mentioned that a key consequence of environmental racism is the destruction of communities. For instance, infrastructure projects built among existing communities have traditionally led to the displacement of those communities and the loss of cultural assets.

Systems of power was also a topic of note among expert participants. They shared their frustrations over the Canadian legal system and the disrespect and exclusion often demonstrated by those in this system towards Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities experiencing environmental racism. This exclusion hinders Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities from being involved in the conversation and being part of the decision-making processes regarding their communities. Numerous experts argued this is partly due to the erasure of Indigenous culture because Indigenous rights are not seen as valid as Canadian law. One expert shared that for Black communities specifically, their exclusion from these decision-making processes needs to be understood in the context of the residual impacts of Black enslavement in Canada.

Some experts also witnessed higher value being placed on academic knowledge over lived experience in the legal system. The experts expressed the importance of ensuring that laws, regulations, programs and policies addressing environmental racism are developed in collaboration with affected communities and include strong accountability measures. The experts also brought up the value of integrating Indigenous knowledge and value systems into environmental laws and policies to ensure the integrity of the environment is being upheld for generations to come.

Several experts shared the need in Canada for the systematic collection of race-based data on environmental racism. They emphasized that data collection not only plays an essential role in understanding the scope and severity of environmental racism, it is critical for telling the story. The experts underscored the importance of storytelling as a tool for raising awareness about environmental racism in Canada and advocating to change the societal standards that normalize this unacceptable reality.

Lastly, the experts raised the emerging concern of climate change and the disproportionate impacts it is having and will continue to have on communities who are already struggling with environmental racism. They shared that the impacts of climate change are and will continue to be detrimental to Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities because of existing socioeconomic differences within the general population.

The experts provided a number of suggestions for work the CHRC should consider with regard to advocating on the issue of environmental racism and interrelated human rights issues. The actions generally fall within the following three themes (see Suggested CHRC Action Items on page 15 for more information):

- Advocating with government
- Changing the standard through storytelling
- Exploring ways for supporting communities

The CHRC is indebted to the panel of experts who participated in this meaningful Fast Talk. Their valuable knowledge and expertise has made clear the link between environmental racism and human rights in Canada.

The information gained from this Fast Talk will be used to identify key issues to help the CHRC plan future work on these issues and to explore options to advocate for human rights impacted by environmental racism in Canada.

Background

“Environmental racism is the disproportionate proximity and greater exposure of Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities to polluting industries and environmentally hazardous activities.”¹

On February 16, 2023, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) hosted a Fast Talk to explore the issue of environmental racism in Canada. A “Fast Talk” is a mini-roundtable consultation that brings together a small group of experts virtually on a given subject. Through this Fast Talk, the aim was to enhance the CHRC’s collective awareness and build the CHRC’s capacity to understand the issue of environmental racism, including its intersections with climate action and human rights, particularly the human right to adequate housing. The information gained from this Fast Talk will be used to identify key issues to help the CHRC plan future work on these issues and to explore options to advocate for human rights impacted by environmental racism in Canada.

The Fast Talk consisted of a panel of five experts whose knowledge on environmental racism as activists, academics, and people with lived experience informed the CHRC by increasing and broadening the CHRC’s knowledge and understanding of the current realities, research and thinking on these issues.

Expert participants

The following experts participated in the Fast Talk (see Appendix A for full biographies)

- **Beze Gray** – Anishnaabe land/water protector and student from Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Ontario. One of seven young people taking the Ford government to court for weakening Ontario’s 2030 climate target.
- **Dorene Bernard** – Mom, Grandmother, Survivor, Traditionalist, Water Protector, Water Walker, Teacher, Activist, Mi’kmaq Herbalist
- **Louise DeLisle** – Organizer for environmental justice for black residents of Shelburne and Founder of South End Environmental Injustice Society (SEED)
- **Naolo Charles** – Founder and Project Director, Black Environmental Initiative and Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice
- **Niladri Basu** – Professor, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Environmental Health Sciences, McGill University

¹ [Canadian Encyclopedia - Environmental Racism in Canada](#)

Policy questions

The Fast Talk was completed in two stages. First, the expert panelists were asked to answer the following policy questions in writing:

1. How might drawing on frameworks like intersectional, gender-based and anti-racist and decolonizing analysis, assist in revealing and redressing the impacts of environmental racism on diverse Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities?
2. How does Indigenous sovereignty, knowledge, and climate justice in view of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action inform our understanding of environmental racism and our responsibility to Indigenous reconciliation?
3. What should the CHRC be aware of and paying attention to in terms of geographical, regional and rural vs. urban disparities regarding environmental racism and its intersection with climate change and the right to housing?
4. How does environmental racism affect Indigenous peoples, Black and other racialized communities' human right to adequate housing (e.g. security of tenure, access to basic amenities like clean water, and in a location that is not dangerous or polluted)?
5. What kinds of actions to combat environmental racism have you seen within Canada, as well as in jurisdictions outside of Canada, that Canada can learn from?
6. What are your opinions on the [Private Member's Bill \(C-226\)](#) introduced in Parliament on February 2, 2022?
7. What role could the CHRC play on this important issue, given our position as Canada's national human rights institution and independent human rights watchdog?

The responses were compiled and shared among the experts and CHRC staff in advance of the Fast Talk discussion (see Appendix B for compilation of written responses). The CHRC and experts then participated in a three-hour meeting via Zoom to delve more deeply into the issue. Sue Butchart, Manager of Policy at the CHRC, moderated the Fast Talk and numerous CHRC staff were in attendance as observers, including full-time Commissioners, Sacha Cragg-Gore and Jose Ordonez, and Interim Chief Commissioner, Charlotte-Anne Malischewski.

Fast Talk Discussion

Ongoing impacts of colonialism

“If I could... I would complete a research [study] on... the environmental impact, of every form of colonization around the world so that people start understanding how colonialization, the colonial process, is always connected to the destruction of the environment.” – Expert participant

A dominant theme of the Fast Talk discussion was the influence of colonialism in Canada and its ongoing devastating impacts on Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities. The experts expressed that a number of current problems in Canada, beyond environmental racism, stem from colonialism and the trauma of colonialism, including in healthcare and education. One expert made the point that environmental racism is not a new issue and has been a reality since the earliest days of colonization. Colonialism is deeply rooted within the systems and structures in Canada and therefore the impacts of colonialism will continue until structural changes have been made. One expert mentioned that colonialism is directly connected to the destruction of the environment.

Various experts spoke to the generational trauma caused by colonialism and its direct manifestations in Canada. For example, several experts spoke about the interconnectedness of environmental racism, Indian Residential Schools, the Indian Act, the oil industry, and the disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people in Canada. Some experts also talked about how colonialism perpetuates an erasure of Indigenous knowledge, culture and Indigenous peoples’ right to protect the land.

Another expert raised Africville as an important reminder of the government’s current and continued disregard of the rights and longstanding history of Black communities in Eastern Canada. The expert described how municipal dumps border many historically Black communities, and how the municipal government’s abuse of power has disallowed several community members from speaking up against violations of the environment. The expert also discussed the forced displacement of people and families to unfamiliar territory and the lack of a sustainable source of clean water in Black communities.

Collectively, many experts agreed that because of the ongoing impacts of colonialism that coincide with environmental racism, their communities are subject to tremendous and detrimental health issues and trauma.

Health impacts

“Also, you need to be aware of the health issues behind environmental racism that’s affecting our communities. And the health issues are tremendous and detrimental to the black communities in Nova Scotia because it’s definitely killing us.” – Expert Participant

The experts shared that communities facing environmental racism are disproportionately impacted by negative health outcomes, which are exacerbated by interconnected issues such as socioeconomic status, education levels, lack of governmental support for community infrastructure, and availability of resources to meet daily needs. An expert explained that wealth is highly racialized in our society. They also noted that race is the biggest predictor of environmental racism instances. Another expert shared that environmental racism stems from other kinds of racism such as racism in employment, health, and housing, which disproportionately affects Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. Several experts agreed that Canada has normalized a societal standard that allows individuals experiencing these disparities to have a poorer standard of living.

One expert shared their story about their fight for clean water in a historically Black community that relies on dug wells and whose water supply is contaminated as a result of environmental racism. Safe drinking water pipelines connecting to nearby communities bypass the Black community completely. When this issue was raised to their town council, they were told to get potable water from a tap at the sewer plant. The expert shared their disbelief of how this could be considered an acceptable standard of living in Canada. The expert stated that this act of environmental racism is unthinkable, and yet decision-makers still do not want to recognize it is a racist issue.

Several experts referred to increasing numbers of chronic illnesses and deaths within communities that continue to experience the impacts of environmental racism. Some shared stories of high rates of chronic illness in impacted communities. For example, the cancer and respiratory illnesses that result from contaminated water supplies and residents' close proximity to waste disposal facilities and high pollution emitting industries. Experts reported that communities are left without infrastructure for clean water, sewer systems, sustainable housing, and accessible roads to get in and out of their community, which compounds the disparities experienced from environmental racism.

In addition to physical health impacts, several experts raised the serious impacts on spiritual and mental health for those living in communities facing environmental racism. Some experts expressed that this results from the ongoing stress and trauma of fighting against situations of environmental racism, recognizing the impacts on community health, and dealing with the lack of support from government to have the situation addressed. One expert shared their concerns over how people living in communities that are near high-polluting industries or factories are being used as unwilling test subjects. The long-term effects on residents of exposure to the chemicals being released by these industries and factories are unknown.

Several experts also raised the intergenerational trauma of environmental racism. One expert expressed that chemical exposure causes intergenerational trauma both physically and mentally. They shared stories of trauma responses to hearing sirens, because in their community growing up, a siren signaled a chemical spill. This expert also explained that while certain chemicals are no longer being produced in Canada, traces of those chemicals can still be detected generations later in the blood systems of their families. This not only has a generational impact on physical health but on psychological health too.

It goes beyond housing

“There’s a history of removing Indigenous peoples from their land. That was the policy of Canada: to take control over the lands and put them somewhere [...] in isolated places, where there’s no infrastructure, sustainable infrastructure for communities. And they get flooded out and they get sent to cities away from their homes, and their homes are left uninhabitable by mould [...].” – Expert participant

The human right to adequate housing and its intersectional impacts on Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities in Canada is a particular focus for the CHRC. What we heard from several experts is that environmental racism goes far beyond housing.

Adequate housing is more than four walls and a roof. As per the criteria outlined by the United Nations,² the human right to adequate housing goes beyond the physical structure and includes such things as having access to basic services like clean drinking water, and being able to live in an area that is not polluted, nor hazardous.

The experts noted that people are also losing their communities, their space, and their cultural assets as a direct result of the impacts of environmental racism. For example, one expert talked about trying to find a place to engage in land-based teachings for the children and youth in their community. The expert explained that large industries have overtaken and destroyed the lands they used to hunt and fish on, and practice sustainable ways of living. Another expert shared their firsthand experiences of being unable to follow the teachings of the generations prior to them because of how the environment has changed as result of the pollution in their community.

Experts shared that not only are the housing infrastructures in Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities deteriorating in many instances, in some communities there is not enough housing to shelter all community members. An expert shared they are unable to live in their community due to the lack of housing, which has forced members to live elsewhere, causing them to be displaced from their communities and traditional lands.

Need for systemic change

“The standard that we have, that low income people live in polluted environments, is really the target. In my opinion, we can change that standard and this is where we need to focus.” – Expert Participant

Numerous experts raised the need for systemic change and the decolonizing of existing power structures in Canada to address environmental racism — given that it is a systemic issue. One expert shared a reference to the Foundation Strategy Group (FSG)’s³ report on systemic

² [The human right to adequate housing | OHCHR](#)

³ FSG is an international organization headquartered in Boston, consisting of various consultants and advisors that help organizations reimagine their approach to social change - [FSG - Reimagining Social Change](#)

change, entitled *Water of Systems Change*.⁴ The report looks at the stages of systemic change: the first level regarding policies, practices, and resource flow, the second level about relationships and power dynamics, and the third level about mental models.

The expert emphasized the importance of mental models or standards in society when considering solutions for systemic change. As an example, the expert explained that standards exist currently in Canadian society that directly equate someone's value to their financial situation. This results in disrespect towards people of lower socioeconomic status, which then leads to disrespecting their environment, which ultimately results in a lack of care towards their infrastructures and their communities. Experts also explained that wealth is highly racialized in society. Therefore, as a society, they said, we have normalized a worse standard of living for poor and racialized communities. The experts stated these kinds of current mental models or societal standards in Canadian society are directly connected to colonial history and the value systems colonialism has put into place.

The experts collectively agreed that the use of storytelling plays an important role in advocating for changing societal mental models or standards. The experts referred to the sharing of stories and experiences of communities directly impacted by environmental racism as a key vehicle for change. One expert shared the example of the impact that storytelling through the #MeToo movement had on changing standards in society with regard to sexual violence. The experts all agreed that storytelling is critical in raising awareness about the urgency of the impacts of environmental racism and changing society's mind so that it is not considered normal that any communities live in polluted areas.

One expert participant made a comment regarding the documentary, "There's Something In The Water",⁵ about the ENRICH project⁶ as being the first impactful and successful example of storytelling about the realities of environmental racism in Canada. The expert emphasized that the documentary created a movement of people who started to care about the issue in Nova Scotia. Another participant noted that storytelling can be used to advocate worldwide about the issue of environmental racism in Canada.

Integrating Indigenous knowledge

"So when you see the things that are happening around the world, you see the women that are Indigenous to that land to come forward first because of the responsibility to protect the water for their community, and their people but also the animals and the flyers and the swimmers and all life, the plants, everything that needs that water to live." – Expert participant

The integration of Indigenous knowledge into efforts to mitigate the effects of environmental racism was a reoccurring topic throughout the Fast Talk. One expert spoke about the traditional

⁴ [The Water of Systems Change - FSG](#)

⁵ ENRICH Project's [Documentary – There's Something In The Water](#)

⁶ [ENRICH Project](#)

role of Indigenous women as water keepers and their sacred duty to protect the lands and the waters. This expert said they believe that the human right to protect the land and the water is not being upheld in Canada. Part of the problem, they argued, is that from their perspective, Canadians are depending on Indigenous peoples to save the land and water because of the inherent Indigenous rights and roles as caretakers and nurturers of Canada's lands and waters. However, this expert noted that this is difficult because Indigenous peoples' right to protect the land is not written in any law books. This expert also shared during the Fast Talk a teaching about the importance of water — how everything depends on it, and how it is important to know where our water comes from so that we can respect and protect it.

Several experts highlighted that the models upon which environmental laws are based need to integrate Indigenous values. When making decisions, Indigenous communities keep in mind the seven generations of the past, and the seven generations of the future. This honours the relationships past generations have had with the environment and preserves the integrity of the environment for the generations to come. In addition, contrary to Indigenous beliefs, which view all living beings including the earth as equals, experts shared that a hierarchy has been created by colonialism that views the earth as a resource or commodity that can be used for capitalistic gain. One expert noted that if we were able to think like Indigenous communities, we wouldn't be having environmental racism issues.

Access to justice

“Our cases are having to explain our Indigenous ways of life and that our laws aren't seen as valid as Canadian law, which is way newer than our Indigenous ways, than our ways of life, and our laws, our natural law, are not seen.” – Expert participant

Many experts touched on how communities experiencing issues of environmental racism in Canada do not have access to justice. An expert shared that they were involved in founding the Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice with the motivation of creating a structure through which communities can report situations of environmental racism and seek support. They emphasized that it should not be civil society who are expected to create these systems; but that there should be a responsible government body where communities facing environmental racism can go to report the situation and seek assistance in exposing the issue and seeking remedies.

Members of communities impacted by environmental racism, including youth and Elders, are often the ones standing on the frontlines in attempts to have their voices heard due to the lack of action. Powerful stories were shared of members on the frontlines of protests, many of whom were ultimately criminalized for their actions.

One expert shared that community members are not being taken seriously in court and legal settings because Indigenous ways of life and Indigenous laws are not seen as valid as Canadian law — that academic experience is more respected than lived experience. This results in community members, including Elders who carry traditional stories and youth with lived experiences, not being taken seriously when advocating for their communities and their rights

in these legal spaces. One expert expressed their frustration that academics are more often accepted into these spaces to share communities' stories than community members themselves are. Another expert also noted that Indigenous land defenders are set up to fail in the court system because the rights of Indigenous peoples to protect their land are not written down in Canada's law books.

Some experts expressed frustrations with the fact that those who are putting policies and laws in place are not themselves living in the communities impacted by environmental racism, nor are they listening or consulting with the ones that are being directly impacted. One expert raised that when pipelines burst or chemicals spill into the land and water, this does not impact the lives of those who have developed the laws or regulations because they don't live in the impacted communities. Another expert shared an example of decision makers who did not live in their community being the ones with the power to deny the community a connection to clean treated water. Other experts shared concerns about the laws being developed not including adequate accountability measures, including clean up and remediation of the land. The need for policy makers to demonstrate respect for affected Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities and bring them to the decision-making tables was shared by all experts. One expert also raised the importance of policy makers recognizing the history and colonial roots of environmental racism.

Several experts raised the need to integrate environmental justice more broadly into Canadian regulations, policies and programs. One expert shared that Canada does not have effective regulations for mining and industry. Another expert noted that while all U.S. federal agencies have to have environmental justice programs, there is no comparable requirement for Canadian federal departments.

The experts all agreed that environmental rights legislation in Canada is not working. One expert noted that since we all have a right to clean water and clean air, we need to write it into our laws that we have a right to a clean environment. Two federal bills currently being considered by Parliament were discussed during the Fast Talk: Bill C-226 and Bill S-5. Experts stated that the fact that these issues are being written into text is a hopeful signal in the fight for change.

If passed, Bill C-226⁷ (introduced in a previous Parliament session as Bill C-230) would result in the development of a national strategy to study environmental racism and address the harms it has caused at a federal level. One expert noted the importance of how this bill would require the Government of Canada to collect data on the reality of environmental racism. They expressed that data is essential — not only to better understand the problem, but also to be able to tell the story and communicate about it.

⁷ [C-226 \(44-1\) - LEGISinfo - Parliament of Canada](#)

Bill S-5 would give Canadians a legal right to a healthy environment.⁸ It would also require the federal government to consider the cumulative effects of toxic substances on human health and the environment. During the discussion, it was noted that Bill S-5 states that Canadians have a right to a healthy environment “subject to any reasonable limit.”⁹ One expert very simply said that this caveat should be removed because the right to a clean environment is non-negotiable.

Several experts highlighted that laws are not enough unless they contain strong accountability measures and are effectively implemented, particularly in Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. This includes requiring meaningful consultations directed by impacted communities, as well as enforceable penalties and consequences for violating the laws. More than one expert shared frustration that currently, when companies who have been polluting a community are finally required to stop, they are merely given a slap on the wrist but are not required to restore the land the way it was before the project started. One expert expressed that fines are not enough of a penalty. They said that enforceable requirements have to be built in for remediation of the land. The experts also noted that the need for government agencies to be responsible for monitoring environmental impacts should be integrated into legislation rather than this onus falling to community members. One expert shared that members of their community discovered, through their own independent research, that there was a tailing pond¹⁰ that was leaking into their communities, wetlands, and ocean. This expert noted that if community members had not taken the initiative to collect data, the leak would have never been discovered because corporations do not tend to monitor themselves and self report.

Role of data

“Monitoring is when you systematically institutionalize communities, empower them, provide the education, provide the resources, provide the funding, so that they can take the measurements day in and day out forever.” – Expert participant

Many experts raised the importance of data collection and the role data plays in understanding the severity and reality of environmental racism. Experts shared that data also plays an important role in equipping communities with the evidence needed to communicate the issue more efficiently. Experts expressed concern about the lack of data collected in Canada in relation to the impact of environmental racism on Indigenous, Black and other racialized people and communities. Experts noted that community members and grassroots organizations are carrying the load by collecting the majority of data that does exist. Several experts shared

⁸ During the Fast Talk in February, Bill S-5 was currently before Parliament. Since then, Bill S-5 received Royal Assent on June 13, 2023 - [S-5 \(44-1\) - LEGISinfo - Parliament of Canada](#)

⁹ Ibid. See subsection 3(2) of Bill S-5, which amends subsection 2(1) of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

¹⁰ Tailings ponds are one of the methods used to store tailings, the waste material left over from ore extraction processes

examples of communities that have taken it upon themselves to monitor and collect data related to environmental racism. All of the experts shared examples of communities, NGOs, and academics proactively testing air, water and land quality, as well as pollution data, to document the impacts of environmental racism.

Several experts noted that when studies are government-led, consultations with communities are treated like a “check box” and are not carried out meaningfully. The experts stressed that consultations with communities affected by environmental racism must be meaningful and community-led, owned and operated. This includes allowing community members to dictate the terms of the research from the very beginning and not when collection has already started.

We heard from an expert about the role academics can play in working in collaboration with communities to listen and help communities report the effects of environmental racism. This expert also shared that while there is a strong focus in Canadian academia on environmental racism, there is a void in terms of funding to support collaboration with communities to further research. The expert stressed the importance of research funds going to communities so they can drive the work and dictate the terms of research. This standard is beginning to take hold, but more is needed. The expert talked about the Northern Contaminants Program as a positive example of how research being undertaken in the North is largely controlled now by Inuit and northern leaders.

Experts highlighted that the collection of data is critical as it can be used for advocacy efforts to ensure that environmental racism and its effects remains a priority issue in Canada.

The experts shared that storytelling can also be used as a method of data collection and knowledge translation. This can help in advocating for change by sharing the realities and unique needs of different communities impacted by environmental racism. The experts shared that while scientific data about environmental racism is important, the stories about the impacts on communities are often a critical tipping point in advocating for change.

Effects of climate change

“I’m very concerned about climate change and environmental laws when it comes to our communities.” – Expert participant

The experts raised concerns regarding the additional urgency of addressing environmental racism as climate change worsens. Experts stressed the repercussions of climate change are going to be disproportionately devastating for communities who are impacted by environmental racism. The experts shared that there are communities who are already struggling with access to clean water. The concern is what will happen when climate changes affects the well water levels in communities that have not yet been provided access to potable water.

We heard frustration among the experts about how Indigenous youth are trying to learn back their traditional teaching and cultures. The challenge they are facing, however, is that the active practicing of those teachings and cultures has been impacted in recent generations by the legacy of colonialism. An expert shared that previous generations were taught to be ashamed of their culture, whereas generations today are trying to reclaim it and learn it back. However, the expert noted they are doing so in a state of crisis. Communities can see the direct impacts of environmental racism on their teachings and ways of life in the lack of physical space needed to practice traditions like hunting, fishing, and other land-based learning. One expert expressed that the impacts that Indigenous communities are facing from environmental racism and climate change create more waves of trauma on communities that have been struggling already for generations with the lasting and ongoing effects of colonialism and residential schools.

Recommended actions for the CHRC

The Fast Talk experts shared suggested various concrete actions for the CHRC to consider:

Advocating with government

Legislative matters

The experts highlighted the role of the CHRC in advocating for the adoption of relevant federal legislative bills currently before Parliament: Bill C-226 and Bill S-5. Experts also stressed that in order for these bills to be effective they must include provisions for accountability, meaningful consultation, and enforceable consequences for violations.

The experts also brought up the importance of ensuring that the bills are done right the first time as experts noted that once laws are passed, they will remain for generations. It will be essential that the appropriate individuals, communities and organizations are being consulted, and that the bills include the perspectives and ideas from individuals with lived experiences.

Government policies and programs

Experts raised the importance of advocating to integrate environmental justice perspectives into a wide array of federal government policies and programs.

One expert expressed that the CHRC can work with provincial housing authorities to ensure that the human right to housing is met in communities, including access to clean water.

Changing the standard through storytelling

The experts suggested the CHRC listen, learn and advocate to support efforts to change the standard that currently exists in Canadian society. That is, changing society's mind so that it is not considered normal that any communities live in polluted areas.

Many experts suggested this could be in the form of data collection to assist in telling the stories about communities impacted by environmental racism. This could include the CHRC commissioning reports and research.

Experts also highlighted the role of the CHRC in assisting in amplifying the stories of communities facing environmental racism, including collecting, preserving and sharing stories.

One expert conveyed that the CHRC can play an important role in continuing the dialogue about environmental racism including through opportunities such as this Fast Talk, so peers can continue to come together to share and exchange knowledge.

One expert also suggested that organizations like the CHRC should ensure that they continue important internal work to explore the types of ideas and behaviours in their own organization that may be perpetuating the status quo.

Exploring ways to support communities

The experts suggested that the CHRC could play a role in advocating for the creation of a designated government body or mechanism where communities can report issues or violations regarding environmental racism.

This could also serve as a tool for communities to obtain help to navigate the legal system.

Several experts also expressed the need for the CHRC to consider options for compensation or remedy when communities are impacted by environmental racism.

Conclusion

This Fast Talk on environmental racism provided a depth of knowledge that will continue to inform our work at the CHRC. We came away with a greater understanding of the many interconnected factors that are involved in perpetuating environmental racism in Canada. The different ideas reported by the experts will inform the CHRC's future actions in our work to help address and raise awareness about the current and future state of the intersections between environmental racism, climate action and the human right to adequate housing. The experts invited to the Fast Talk provided invaluable insights that the CHRC will use to strengthen our role in approaching this issue in the future.

Appendix A

Biographies of experts

Beze Gray - Anishnaabe land/water protector and student from Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Ontario. One of seven young people taking the Ford government to court for weakening Ontario's 2030 climate target

Beze Gray (they/ them/ theirs) is a Two-Spirit, trans, non binary Anishnaabe/Oneida/Munsee/Lunaape from Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Beze's main focuses in life are language and cultural revitalization, and being a Two Spirit youth advocate for environmental racism and injustices their community Aamjiwnaang faces. They are a land and water protector speaking out about Canada's petrochemical (oil) industry and its impacts on the waters, lands and people in the Great Lakes. Beze graduated from Georgian College in Anishnaabemowin & Program Development and continues to study language. Beze is a founding member of Niizh Manidook Hide Camp, The Toxic Tour — an awareness raising tour through Canada's Chemical Valley and ASAP (Aamjiwnaang and Sarnia Against Pipelines). They are one of seven young people taking the Ontario Government to court over Ontario's 2030 climate target. They are currently working in the Technoscience Research Lab at the University of Toronto, doing work on pollution data research and creating accessible resources for Aamjiwnaang.

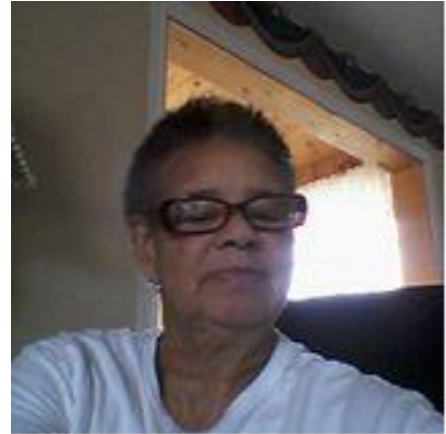
Dorene Bernard - Mom, Grandmother, Survivor, Traditionalist, Water Protector, Water Walker, Teacher, Activist, Mi'kmaq Herbalist

Dorene Bernard is a Mi'kmaq Grassroots Grandmother, from the Sipekne'katik band in Mi'kmak'i. She is a Water Protector, Water Walker, and Survivor of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. She has a Master of Social Work and worked in Mi'kmaq Child Welfare for 15 years and Community Support for Residential School Survivors over the past 10 years. In 2017, she was the Coady International Institute Chair in Social Justice, sharing her teachings on Indian Residential School legacy, Social Justice, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/Girls, Environmental Racism and Climate Justice. Dorene was a participant in the documentary, "There's Something in the Water," directed by Elliot Page on environmental racism. The grassroots Grandmother Water Protectors were awarded the first Wel-Lukwen Award (Nova Scotia Human Rights Award) in 2022, in recognition of their selfless commitment to Netukulimk, the protection of our water, the environment, and the wellbeing of future generations.



Louise DeLisle - Organizer for environmental justice for black residents of Shelburne, Nova Scotia and Founder of South End Environmental Injustice Society

Louise Delisle is a grassroots activist and founder of the South End Environmental Injustice Society (SEED). SEED is a Black-led non-profit society and direct grassroots response to the siting of a landfill near Shelburne’s African-Nova Scotian and working-poor community. It is a volunteer effort aimed at addressing issues of environmental racism. SEED was awarded a 2018 Nova Scotia Human Rights Award and made international news with the release of the documentary, “There’s Something in The Water.” To improve access to clean drinking water in her community, Louise has initiated extensive water testing in partnership with Rural Water Watch, advocated successfully for the creation of a community well in partnership with NSCC and funding partners, installed UV treatment and filtration systems on homes in the Black community with contaminated water in partnership with LUSH Canada.



Naolo Charles – Founder and Project Director, Black Environmental Initiative

Naolo Charles is an environmental communications specialist. He is the founder of the Black Environmental Initiative (BEI). Naolo also co-founded the Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice (CCECJ), a coalition launched to support racialized communities affected by pollution and climate change impacts. Naolo has been invited many times to speak in conferences and in the media about environmental justice. Holder of a master's degree in environment, Naolo was also one of the experts invited on an advisory table brought together by Environment and Climate Change Canada to develop Canada’s first national adaptation strategy. In addition to his social entrepreneurship, Naolo currently works as a Program Director in a foundation. Before starting the BEI, Naolo worked for over 8 years for various organizations including foundations, universities, governments and start-ups.



Niladri Basu: Professor, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Environmental Health Sciences, McGill University

Dr. Niladri (Nil) Basu is a Professor at McGill University where he holds the Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Environmental Health Sciences. His group is based in McGill's Center for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE). It was created by Indigenous leaders as a participatory research and education center to address their concerns about the integrity of their traditional food systems. The goal of Prof. Basu's research is to take an ecosystem approach to community, occupational, and environmental health whereby evidence is collected, scrutinized, and compared from both human communities and ecological organisms. The work has resulted in approximately 240 peer-reviewed papers, and supported advanced training to over 100 individuals, including 8 visiting scientists, 16 postdoctoral fellows, and 13 PhD students. The research has been supported by more than 45 grants totaling over \$35 million. Prof. Basu's research is both inter-disciplinary (bridges environmental quality and human health, increasing involvement of social scientists) and inter-sectoral (most projects driven by stakeholder needs, notably government and communities.) His work focuses on environmental justice concerns. Increasingly Prof. Basu has assumed national and international leadership positions to bring together diverse teams to tackle grand challenges in the field (e.g., toxicity testing in the 21st century, mercury pollution.) Prof. Basu's research is also situated at the interface of science and policy with notable involvements with the UN Minamata Convention, Canada's Chemicals Management Plan, and the Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health.

