

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Two summers into the refugee housing crisis, Ontario advocates say
African refugee claimants need help living dignified lives**

TORONTO, JULY 26, 2024 – The African Canadian Collective (ACC) and its advocacy partners are calling on the federal and provincial governments to address the urgent needs that persist for African refugee claimants arriving in Canada.

In July 2023, the ACC brought together housing and refugee advocates to shed light on the plight of refugee claimants arriving from African countries after they were left on the streets of Toronto, unhoused and without community services or support. One year later, more people continue to arrive and are being dispersed to communities across the province without adequate wrap-around support in place.

The ACC and partners gathered today at Queen’s Park, Ontario’s legislative headquarters, to share what’s been happening to African refugee claimants over the past year and demand that all levels of government work immediately to help resolve their plight.

“There is a dire need to provide substantive wrap-around services in more cities across Ontario for African refugee claimants, invest in pathways to permanent housing, and challenge the narrative of anti-Black racism and xenophobia,” shared Debbie Douglas, Executive Director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). “Even though many African refugee claimants who arrived in Ontario last year had a difficult start, what often gets lost in their story is that they are highly skilled and talented people who have a lot to offer to this province.”

The ACC and partners are calling for decisive action from municipalities across Ontario to step up for refugee claimants. They are also demanding increased funding and resources from both the federal and provincial governments.

“Last year, there was a lot of talk about a reception centre as a major part of the solution to the problem; but 12 months down the road we still don’t have an opening date. Our collective and allies are still supporting African refugee claimants every day, using our depleted resources,” said Eddie Jjumba, Senior Pastor of Milliken Church. “The community is stretched too thin and we are worried about leaving our brothers and sisters without any tangible wrap-around support.”

African refugee claimants have been moved around Toronto and other municipalities across Canada. However, most communities are under-resourced and not adequately prepared to support these newcomers.

“African refugee claimants need access to further training, resources and education, and it’s more than what municipalities and community groups can do alone,” shared Rev. Alexa Gilmour, United Church Minister and co-chair of Crisis in Our City. “Over the past year, refugee-serving groups have shored up the safety net when our systems failed, but community groups are exhausted and people are suffering as they wait,” she continued.

The ACC and its partners are urgently asking for all levels of government to immediately make good on the support they promised.

“Over the past year, we have demonstrated the African principles of Ma’at and Ubuntu — those are values of reciprocity and doing what we can. However, it’s heartbreaking for us, especially those of us from the continent, to realize that one year later we are still feeling like we’re in a similar place of limbo,” stressed Kizito Musabimana, co-chair of the ACC and founder of the Rwandan Canadian Healing Centre. “We need government action and investment now. We need to shift from relief work to development. Our brothers and sisters don’t need handouts, we are demanding that governments give them a hand up.”

About the African Canadian Collective:

The African Canadian Collective (ACC) is dedicated to establishing an African refugee sector in Canada. Through a systems transformation approach, advocacy and community engagement, ACC works to address the challenges faced by African refugee claimants and promote their well-being, integration and success in Canadian society.



About DAYO Media & Communications:

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