

## **Stronger Together - Solidarity Statement**

We, the undersigned, are a collaborative partnership of network leaders in social innovation, social finance, the social economy, and community economic development across Canada. We provide this joint statement to deepen our commitment to rooting out racism, colonization, and exclusion in our work and sector.

### **Acknowledgement**

We, the undersigned, collectively acknowledge that colonialism has deep roots in Canada and its legacy persists in society's intolerable treatment of people of African descent. While issues of systemic racism are present for many people living in Canada, we acknowledge the recent and disproportionately fatal incidents within Indigenous and Black communities. We also acknowledge generations of African Nova Scotians who have resisted oppression in isolation in the Maritimes.

### **Joint Statement**

As a collective, we recognize the only sensible position to take in the face of racism is anti-racism. In our work towards sustainable and inclusive communities we denounce anti-Black racism in every malicious form it takes; in our communities, our organizations, and in Canada's systems and institutions.

We are also committed to confronting economic arrangements that are unsound, and which concentrate capital and exclude many people living in Canada. We are committed to equity in access to capital, sharing power and addressing the systemic barriers that exacerbate wealth disparity.

### **State of the Field**

Understanding that the wealth and health of communities are inextricably linked, we call for community leadership and determination of resource allocation, assets, decision-making, and policy development. It is clear to us that across Canada, we have deep divides between the rich, poor, and everyday families. What is also clear to us is that African Canadian and Indigenous communities have a rich and textured array of organizations, social enterprises and businesses that require equitable access to meaningful opportunities.

We find commonality in visions focused on systemic change across a variety of domains including, but not limited to: innovations towards new and better ways of organizing communities; democratizing and distributing social, political, and economic activity fairly; and living in a way that respects the limits of the planet. Unfortunately, many of us also find commonality in our shortcomings when it comes to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.

This moment of pandemic where some communities face greater health care challenges due to broken systems has intertwined with Black communities yet again, rising up to demand justice in the face of police brutality and institutional racism. In this land, Indigenous people have survived devastating injustice, also resulting in the disproportionately negative interactions with social services, justice systems, and healthcare. These dynamics are complex. They are not just about the current moment of uprising, but they are historical, insidious, and deeply woven into society in Canada.

Social innovation, community economic development, and the social economy purport to tackle these challenges by putting control and leadership in the hands of communities themselves. They work to disrupt old patterns so people can build new organizations, new ways of working, new structures and policies, together.

We will not succeed in these efforts if we don't start from the inside out. We must uplift the leadership and innovation of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), and listen carefully to the narratives and wisdom being shared. We must examine and concretely change our own leadership, our teams, internal policies and practices, discovering where we reinforce the old systems we're aiming to uproot. And we must demand that our partners and governments come along with us in this work.

### **Three Key Audiences**

**To the African Canadian** -- we recognize you are not represented in many professional disciplines and sectors, despite your strength and ingenuity in social innovation. Your absence here is a mistake that we aim to address. When you create incredible ways to provide community care, when you develop your own systems to support amazing initiatives, when you organize thousands of people to march and demand change, and when you build flourishing businesses, you are demonstrating tremendous socially innovative work, too often without the support you deserve.

**To the Government of Canada** -- we have been impressed with the commitment to co-creation in the emerging Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy, but note that it falls short of deep inclusion of innovative BIPOC community leaders. We're also concerned that the only commitments so far are to investment readiness and social finance, often with a focus on scalability understood through a financial investment lens. This approach means that some cultural practices, community assets, nonprofits, and grassroots organizations that are essential in many BIPOC, local and rural communities are likely to be overlooked or excluded. The framework and incentives offered via the Investment Readiness Program and anticipated in the Social Finance Fund are largely based on ability to take on and repay debt, rather than empowering social innovation regardless of investment potential. Without deeply co-creating the model with BIPOC communities, we fear that key communities will be further marginalized and the systemic discrimination already existing in financial systems will be perpetuated. If that were to happen, this model would conflict with federal commitments to Truth & Reconciliation, the Decade for People of African Descent, Gender Equality, and action to prevent climate change. Moving forward, we therefore ask you to consider the wider range of recommendations made by the SISF Strategy Steering Committee and to deeply include BIPOC leadership as you proceed in growing the social innovation ecosystem beyond social finance. In that spirit of co-creation, we include you here as partners and hope you'll also join us in quickly implementing the suggested recommendations below, including those focused on the Investment Readiness Program and Social Finance Fund.

**To our fellow leaders and practitioners in social innovation, social finance, the social economy, and community economic development** -- we hope you will join us in taking up this internal reflection and action process towards an anti-racist and decolonized movement. We hope you'll diversify your leadership, not just internally but also with respect to the communities, voices, and initiatives from which you watch and learn. We implore you to invest in your own understanding of anti-oppression and the effects of colonization. Bring that awareness into your organizational decisions by divesting from actions that are not explicitly anti-racist. Understand what actions are required to decolonize our work and processes with a renewed commitment to invest money and energy towards this work. Let's shift our own mindsets -- while we know communities certainly need more resources for this work, let's recognize that we do have a wealth of knowledge, connections, resources, and access to power.

## Key Actions

As we do this work, we have identified some actions we can undertake within the related worlds of social innovation, social finance, the social economy, and community economic development. Specifically, as the Investment Readiness Program, Social Finance Fund, and eventual fulsome Social Innovation/Social Finance Strategy unfold, we will work on the following:

1. Creation of a standing meeting/working group in the social enterprise and social finance ecosystem, to work towards advancing inclusion, diversity, equity, and access
2. Development of performance indicators as well as tools for measuring this work that we believe should become standard for all IRP/SFF and future program partners, regardless of their areas of focus
3. Development of anti-racism and anti-oppression training that we recommend become standard for all IRP/SFF and future program partners. To begin this, we'll source a list of strong anti-racist educators from BIPOC communities to facilitate this work
4. Diversity & Inclusion policy promotion and development amongst Investment Readiness Program partners and wider ecosystem stakeholders within their respective organizations
5. Development and implementation of an intermediary specifically for the African Canadian community in the Social Finance Fund. This should be complemented by a standard commitment and enforceable performance measures for all intermediaries to engage with diverse communities
6. Collaboration towards the development of a self-determined fund to engage traditionally under-represented people living in Canada in the social finance and social enterprise ecosystem through small catalyst grants and non-repayable loans

As we undertake this work, we invite our partners to join us and radically re-imagine not what is, but what could be. **In solidarity, The undersigned**



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Throughout this joint statement the terms "Black", "people of African descent" and "African Nova Scotians", are used to ensure inclusion and acknowledgement. "African Nova Scotians" are specifically named and acknowledged due to generational isolation and disregard of their narratives and resilience.

Black people is a skin color-based classification for specific people with a mid to dark brown complexion. Not all black people have dark skin; in certain countries, often in socially based systems of racial classification in the Western World, the term "black" is used to describe persons who are perceived as dark-skinned compared to other populations.

In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected. Around 200 million people identifying themselves as being of African descent live in the Americas.

Black Nova Scotians or African Nova Scotians are Black Canadians whose ancestors primarily date back to the Colonial United States as slaves or freemen, and later arrived in Nova Scotia, Canada during the 18th century.