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MPs pass long-awaited legislation to tackle environmental racism in Canada

Advocates celebrate milestone, call on Senate to prioritize Bill C-226

OTTAWA| TRADITIONAL, UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE ALGONQUIN ANISHNAABEG PEOPLE – Advocates for social justice and equity, environmental protection and public health celebrate passage of Bill C-226, the National Strategy on Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, in the House of Commons.

The bill now moves to the Senate. If approved by both chambers of parliament, Bill C-226 will become law, and require the government to examine the links between racialization, socio-economic status and environmental risk, and to develop Canada's first national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice.

Advocates say this is long overdue. A [2020 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxic Wastes and Human Rights](#) pointed to “a pattern in Canada where marginalized groups, and Indigenous peoples in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada.”

The United States established a program on environmental justice nearly three decades ago, with an executive order issued in 1994. Canada lacks any parallel requirements.

Dr. Ingrid Waldron, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice (CCECJ), said, “We know the stories about where and how environmental racism exists in Canada. The formal data on these realities is incomplete and therefore there is a lack of understanding about how real this problem is.

Bill C-226 will be a starting point for data to be collected and acted upon. The consequences of inaction on environmental racism would be ongoing negative impacts on people's health and well-being. The strategy created with Bill C-226 means action to redress environmental racism and action for environmental justice for all.”

The strategy must reflect the needs of the communities and peoples most knowledgeable about the impacts of environmental racism and injustice, whose expertise will contribute to a meaningful framework to prevent further injustice and ill health, say advocates.

Bill C-226 was first introduced by former MP Lenore Zann as Bill C-230 in the last session of Parliament. It was approved by the House of Commons environment committee in June 2021 but then died on the order paper when Parliament dissolved for elections. On February 2, 2022, MP Elizabeth May re-introduced the same legislation as

Bill C-226. Government and NDP MPs supported the bill, ensuring its passage in the House of Commons.

The Canadian Coalition for Environment & Climate Justice (CCECJ), supported by a number of civil society groups, now urges the Senate to make time for consideration of Bill C-226 at the earliest opportunity. It is our hope that this bill will become law before the summer so that the important work of developing a national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice can begin.

Groups supporting this statement:

- Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice (CCECJ)
- Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequalities and Community Health Project (The ENRICH Project)
- Black Environmental Initiative
- Breast Cancer Action Québec (BCAQ)
- Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE)
- Canadian Environmental Law Association
- Canadian Federation of Medical Students Health and Environment Adaptive Response Task Force (CFMS HEART)
- Climate Strike Canada
- Coalition for Environmental Rights
- David Suzuki Foundation
- Ecojustice
- Environmental Defence
- For Our Kids
- KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
- McGill Nurses for Planetary Health
- Nova Scotia Voice of Women for Peace
- Prevent Cancer Now
- Shake Up The Establishment
- Sierra Club Canada Foundation
- South End Environmental Injustice Society (SEED)
- West Coast Environmental Law
- Women’s Healthy Environments Network (WHEN)

Background information:

- [Text of Bill C-226](#)
- Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate siting of polluting industries and other environmental hazards in Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities, and uneven access to nature and environmental benefits.
- The [US EPA](#) defines environmental justice as, “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: The same degree of protection from environmental and health

hazards, and Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”

- More information about environmental racism is available on the The [ENRICH Project website](#).

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For more information or a media interview, please contact:

Dr. Ingrid Waldron, Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequities and Community Health Project (The ENRICH Project) & Canadian Coalition for Environmental and Climate Justice (CCECJ): waldroni@mcmaster.ca

Ellen Sweeney, Prevent Cancer Now, Ellen.Sweeney@dal.ca

Stefanie Carmichael, David Suzuki Foundation, 437-221-4692, scarmichael@davidsuzuki.org

Jane McArthur, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, 647-762-9168, media@cape.ca, jane@cape.ca

Paula Gray, Environmental Defence, media@environmentaldefence.ca, 705-435-8611

Sean O'Shea. Ecojustice, soshea@ecojustice.ca. 416-368-7533 ext. 523

Manvi Bhalla, Shake Up The Establishment, manvi@shakeuptheestab.org, 905-928-1244

Stanley Jacklyn, SEED, stanley.jacklyn@gmail.com

Lella Blumer, For Our Kids, lella@forourkids.ca

Julia Sawatzky, Pardeep Gill (Co-Chairs), Canadian Federation of Medical Students Health and Environment Adaptive Response Task Force (CFMS HEART), heart@cfms.org

Naomi Pastrana Mankovitz and Sophie Zheng (co-chairs), McGill Nurses for Planetary Health, naomi.pastranamankovitz@mail.mcgill.ca

Kathrin Winkler, Steering Committee, Nova Scotia Voice of Women for Peace, winkler.kathrin2@gmail.com

Fe de Leon, Researcher, Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director, Canadian Environmental Law Association, deleonf@cela.ca theresa@cela.ca

Alexis Stoymenoff, West Coast Environmental Law Association, astoymenoff@wcel.org

Gretchen Fitzgerald, Sierra Club Canada Foundation, gretchenf@sierraclub.ca

Beth Lorimer, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, blorimer@kairoscanada.org