

## Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

Deputation by Regent Park women's groups (Yonge Street Mission).

Shahanara Khandaker, Irum Siddiqui, Rajikumary Karunakaran, Lindsey Hepburn

270 Gerrard St. E. Toronto, Ontario.

416-929-9614 (ext. 3233). [lhhepburn@ysm.ca](mailto:lhhepburn@ysm.ca)

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To the Executive Committee of Toronto City Council and His  
Worship Mayor John Tory;

My name is Shahanara Khandaker, and these are my colleagues Irum Siddiqui, Rajakumary Karunakaran and Lindsey Hepburn. We represent the women's groups of Regent Park which are currently organized through the support of Yonge Street Mission. We are here representing immigrant women's voices for inclusion in the poverty reduction strategy.

As immigrant women, we are facing multiple barriers to participating fully in the economy and Canadian society. It is hard for us to find good jobs, and local jobs that respect our skills and capacities as well as help us continue to support our families and raise children.

Immigrant women can often not get employment in the fields we have been trained in and often do low paying jobs in the community or "volunteer" work – which is really just unpaid labour. We always look for affordable daycare so we can work,

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which is almost impossible to find here in Toronto. Also, many of us have to do lots of the household work: this contributes to sustaining the economy but we are not paid or recognized for our contribution to reducing poverty through our household work.

Employment insecurity impacts us in a negative way. For example: depression, isolation, lack of confidence etc. If we don't have jobs we feel we are lacking value and this undermines our confidence in our abilities to contribute to our communities. We propose the following be seriously considered as top priorities of reducing poverty in our community and other low-income communities in the city like Regent Park:

- Number one: Recognize our contribution already being made by women to reduce poverty in our communities by doing the low paid and unpaid labour involved in caregiving, food production and the maintenance of the household economy. Please, first seek to support us in these roles as the people on the frontlines of poverty reduction.

You can also support us by:

- Increasing access to local jobs for low income women

- Ensure that basic necessities like food and groceries are kept at affordable prices so we can feed our families healthy food
- Increase spaces and subsidies for community owned businesses
- Make affordable childcare accessible to all people who need it
- Change the structure of affordable housing so that we can rent-to-own our apartments and do not have to move out of our communities. Moving is disruptive to our children and families and prevents us from developing our own communities.
- Increase support for grassroots organizations like ours. We have the capacities to develop our own communities and give support to other women in our own cultural groups but we need to be employed for these kinds of community support roles.
- Make more affordable community based skills training. We don't always need to go back to university or college to upgrade our skills – programs should be made readily available for immigrants to gain skills they can use in the Canadian job market.
- Enforce legislation for workplace anti-discrimination that ensures all immigrant and newcomer women have equal access to employment regardless of

gender, religion, race, culture, language or ability.

There should be no discrimination from hiring, payment, promotions, health care insurance.

- Minimum wages should be increased to \$15 an hour

In conclusion, we are thankful for the opportunity to address you here at city hall and hope that our voices, the voices of immigrant women, will be reflected in the poverty reduction strategy and policies embraced by the City of Toronto.

Shahanara