

## DEPUTATION – SANKOFA SQUARE:

Good morning, I am Kemi Jacobs, the Executive Director of Delta Family Resource Centre, a B3 agency located in Northwest Toronto which has delivered services to communities in that area for more than 40 years. While my personal and professional lives have consistently focused on empowering communities and advocating for those whose voices are often silenced, I identify first as an African woman. An African born in the Caribbean, I have lived in Toronto for nearly 40 years. I am a graduate of the Rites of Passage process, a tradition grounded in the Akan tradition of Ghana. I have volunteered with the National Anti Racism Council, CAFCAN Social Services and have been an integral part of Delta Family's journey to becoming a B3 agency – Black led, Black mandated and Black serving. I say all this to establish the fact that as an actively contributing Black resident of Toronto, the renaming of the former Dundas Square as Sankofa Square is intensely personal for me.

Over the past year, a committee of community leaders from Toronto's Black communities came together to select a new name for Dundas Square. As the entire global community was forced to face the harsh reality of the enduring, unrelenting impact of Anti-Black racism in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, many communities reacted by making the conscious decision to overturn the tribal practice of naming streets, buildings and spaces after historical Anglo Saxons who, in their desire to expand and enrich the British empire, perpetuated atrocities against humankind, particularly Black and Brown bodies. Dundas, who never visited Canada, was one such figure who actually delayed the end of the institution of slavery. In view of the fact that his legacy directly impacted the lives of Africans, it is particularly fitting that the new name honours and celebrates African traditions. It was in view of this that, after months of exploration and deliberation, the name Sankofa Square was selected as the new name for the square.

Last month Councillor Holyday asked for an operational and governance review of this initiative, specifically requesting details about current and future costs of the name change, the source of funds for the changes, as well as details regarding timing and the design of signage. The City Manager's office has ably addressed the questions raised, so rather than focusing on already addressed details I choose, instead, to share with council just 2 of the many reasons ***Why it is important for Toronto, and for Black people in Toronto to have a Sankofa Square.***

While we speak of progress made by Black/African Canadians, there are too many Black residents who are still excluded and left behind. This exclusion is often silent, expressed in silences and internalized racism and shame about our proud African heritage, in denial of our identity. It pains me that we still see under-representation of Black teachers in the school system, the over-representation of my people in the Care and Justice systems, and in June 2024 I can hear an educated Black Caribbean woman proudly state that she would not wear a T-Shirt with a map of Africa, because she has no connection to Africa! Having a Sankofa Square, a square which is central to the functioning of Toronto, would do much to erode the impact of internalized racism, leading Black residents to see that our traditions are valued and that we deserve, we can and will take up space.

Toronto is Canada's coolest City. While conditions have changed since COVID, with the sky rocketing cost of living and extremely high housing costs forcing many of us to pause – most of us would not choose to live in any other City. Toronto is dope. We have a reputation for being inclusive, for embracing diversity, being intentional in our effort to be equitable and to promote Anti-Oppression and Anti-Black Racism, and while I may not have drunk the Kool-Aid, there are not too many cities in the world which have a unit (small though it is) devoted to combatting Anti Black Racism. Having a Sankofa Square, a central meeting place in the heart of the City of Toronto which acknowledges the importance of African immigrants, celebrates an African identity and honours the African Adinkra system epitomizes Toronto's warrior spirit, underscores Toronto's commitment to equity and justice at a time when many regions are back sliding on promises made 4 short years ago - and can only enhance this City which we call home.

In closing, while I applaud the City manager's summary of the financial potential of Sankofa Square and of plans to develop strategies to make it viable, I go one step further and suggest that while financial arguments are important, the cost of NOT having an Sankofa Square must also be considered and I ask the question instead – **in 2024, can a City like Toronto afford NOT to have a Sankofa Square?**

Thank you for your time.

## **Speakers**

Emmanuel C. Duodu, President, Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario

Daniel Tate

Joey Scoleri

Joel Goldman

Linda Dundas

Sipho Kwaku

Khalidah Bello

Andrew Lochhead

Lindis Collins-Bacchus

Joseph Mensah

David Firang, Ghanaian Association of Ontario

Mary Akuamoah-Boateng, Vice President, Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario

Kemi Jacobs, Executive Director, Delta Family Resource Centre

Jonny Lp

Camila Collins Araiza, PhD Candidate in History at the University of Toronto

Nina Yaa Frema Aning

Kayla Webber, Partnership and Accountability Circle

Paul Osbourne, Dua Kro Family Services

Rudi Quammie Williams

Ginelle Skerritt, Adinkrafarm

Dwayne Morgan

Gabe Odartei, Executive Secretary, Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario

Andrew Lochhead