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Subject: [External Sender] Samuel Kisitu"s comment on item # EX26.13
Date: September 28, 2025 9:54:47 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)
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PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Delivered by Samuel Kisitu

Good morning, friends, frontline workers, and community leaders.

My name is **Samuel Kisitu**. I am a refugee from Uganda, Co-Founder and Vice President of the Coalition of African-Led Community Organizations in Canada, a proud member of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, and the National Unity Platform (People Power Movement) Canada Chapter.

I stand here today not only for myself, but for the thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and unhoused people being pushed to the margins by cuts to housing and shelter support.

Before I finally secured affordable housing in December 2023, I was one of more than 15,000 people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, as documented in the City's 2024 Street Needs Assessment. I know firsthand what it means to have nowhere to go in a Canadian winter.

When Doug Ford told people to "stay home" during COVID, I had no home. I slept in a storage room at Dominion Church International. Like many African refugees, I moved from shelter to shelter — Seaton House, Fred Victor, Cornerstone — searching for safety, dignity,

and stability.

During that time, I worked as a Personal Support Worker, risking my life to care for others. My story was told by the Toronto Star and Regent Park TV because it reflects what thousands of refugees, migrants, and frontline workers endure every single day. Andrea Horwath once called me a “hero to families.” But heroes don’t need medals — we need housing, justice at work, and permanent status to live with dignity.

I have documented this journey in:

- *Resilience in the City: Samuel Kisitu’s Journey as an African Refugee in Toronto* (Regent Park TV | Dec 2023) . Watch here: <https://youtu.be/U8f31GjTZ21?si=JpLCNrGznU9jmVuP>
- *Living Refugee Struggles & Housing Hardships: A 5-Year Journey from Uganda to Toronto* (Regent Park TV | Sept 2025) Watch here <https://youtu.be/XryRZgBtDjc?si=SgqskVeluv2zIoda>

Today, Toronto’s Executive Committee is hearing Item EX26.13 — cuts to federal and provincial support for housing. On behalf of our communities, I am calling on **Prime Minister Mark Carney: pay your bill**. The federal government owes Toronto **\$107 million** to keep refugees and asylum seekers safe and housed.

If the federal government refuses to pay, thousands who rely on IHAP and COHB to pay their rent — and thousands still waiting in shelters — will be left on the street. Families with children will be forced into encampments. And yes, people will die.

We’ve already seen the consequences. In February 2024, **Delphina Ngigi**, a Kenyan asylum seeker and mother of four, died after waiting six hours outside a Mississauga shelter. She was eventually allowed to sleep in a lobby, but the next day she suffered a medical emergency and passed away. Her death was preventable.

Toronto Public Health reported **79 deaths among unhoused people** in just the first half of 2023 — almost half from drug toxicity. And our Ugandan community is still mourning **Rabibah Nankinga**, who was reported to have committed suicide due to devastations of housing and immigration. These are not statistics — these are lives cut short because governments failed to act.

I agree with Mayor Olivia Chow who has made it clear: without this \$107 million, Toronto’s shelter system will collapse. Cuts to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit mean fewer people will move from shelters into permanent homes. Refugee housing is a **federal responsibility**, yet the federal government is offloading the cost onto Toronto and its property taxpayers.

This is unacceptable.

So today we call on you, **Prime Minister Carney**:

- Restore the \$107 million in refugee housing funding.
- Protect the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit so families can move into permanent homes.

- Stop playing politics with human lives.

I fled Uganda because my government betrayed its people. I came here with nothing but a medal once given to my family in the name of liberation. I called myself *Freeman* because I believed Canada was a place of freedom.

But freedom cannot exist without housing. Dignity cannot exist without safety. And community cannot exist when thousands are left abandoned on the streets.

To my fellow Torontonians — to frontline workers, churches, and community groups who stepped in during last year's refugee housing emergency — thank you. You proved that solidarity is stronger than indifference.

And to Prime Minister Carney: **do your part. Pay your bill. \$107 million is not charity. It is justice. It is my responsibility. It is survival.**

Because in this city, in this country, **everyone deserves a home.**

Thank you.



