



INDO-CARIBBEAN CANADIAN ASSOCIATION

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July 16, 2026

Mayor Olivia Chow and Members of Toronto City Council

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Delivered by email to: mayor_chow@toronto.ca and Councillor_Shan@toronto.ca

Re: Motion by Councillor Shan to Declare July as Caribbean Heritage Month in the City of Toronto

Dear Mayor Olivia Chow and Members of Toronto City Council,

On behalf of the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, I am writing to express our strong support for the City of Toronto formally declaring **July as Caribbean Heritage Month**.

Toronto is home to one of the world's largest and most diverse Caribbean diasporas. For generations, Caribbean Canadians have enriched the city's social, cultural, economic, and civic life through their leadership, entrepreneurship, public service, artistic achievements, and enduring commitment to community. The Caribbean community continues to make invaluable contributions that have helped shape Toronto into one of the world's most vibrant and multicultural cities.

The relationship between Toronto and the Caribbean extends back well over a century. Caribbean migrants began settling in Toronto in increasing numbers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, establishing communities while pursuing opportunities in education, commerce, domestic service, transportation, manufacturing, and the professions. Their numbers grew significantly following the Second World War, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, as changing immigration policies and labour shortages encouraged migration from across the Caribbean. Among the most notable initiatives was the West Indian Domestic Scheme, introduced in 1955, which enabled thousands of Caribbean women to immigrate to Canada. Many later sponsored their families, laying the foundations for thriving Caribbean Canadian communities throughout Toronto and contributing to the city's demographic, social, and economic growth.

These early Caribbean immigrants played an essential role in building modern Toronto. They worked as nurses, teachers, transit operators, civil servants, skilled tradespeople, factory workers, entrepreneurs, academics, artists, and community advocates. Their labour supported the expansion of hospitals, schools, public transit, manufacturing, construction, and municipal services during periods of rapid urban growth. Equally important, they established churches, cultural associations, charitable



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organizations, businesses, and advocacy groups that strengthened neighbourhoods, fostered civic participation, and promoted social inclusion. Their resilience and determination helped shape Toronto into the diverse and welcoming city it is today.

Beyond contributions to public life, the Caribbean community has profoundly influenced Toronto's cultural identity and economic vitality. Caribbean cuisine has become an integral part of the city's culinary landscape, with family-owned restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, and food manufacturers introducing generations of Torontonians to dishes such as jerk chicken, roti, doubles, patties, pepperpot, pelau, curry, callaloo, bake and shark, and tropical beverages. These businesses not only preserve cherished cultural traditions but also support local employment, attract visitors, and contribute to Toronto's reputation as one of the world's premier multicultural food destinations.

The influence of Caribbean languages and dialects has likewise become woven into Toronto's everyday life. The rhythms and expressions of Caribbean English, French, Spanish, Dutch, and numerous Creole languages have enriched the city's linguistic diversity, while Caribbean music, literature, theatre, dance, and oral traditions continue to shape Toronto's creative industries and cultural landscape. Words, expressions, storytelling traditions, and artistic influences rooted in the Caribbean have become familiar features of Toronto's multicultural identity, reflecting the dynamic exchange of cultures that defines our city.

The Caribbean community is also a significant economic driver. Caribbean Canadians have established thousands of businesses across Toronto, including restaurants, retail stores, professional services, construction firms, financial services, healthcare practices, technology companies, transportation providers, tourism enterprises, and creative industries. These entrepreneurs generate employment, strengthen neighbourhood commercial districts, contribute millions of dollars in economic activity, and foster innovation across sectors.

The case for recognizing July as Caribbean Heritage Month is further strengthened by the longstanding success of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival (formerly known as *Caribana*), one of North America's largest cultural festivals and one of Toronto's signature annual events. Originating in 1967 as part of Canada's Centennial celebrations, the Carnival has grown into an internationally recognized celebration of Caribbean culture, attracting participants and visitors from across Canada and around the world. Throughout July and culminating on the Civic Holiday weekend, the Carnival showcases Caribbean music, dance, costume artistry, cuisine, visual arts, and cultural traditions while promoting intercultural understanding and community pride.

Beyond its cultural significance, the Toronto Caribbean Carnival is a major contributor to Toronto's economy. The festival attracts well over one million attendees annually, generating substantial economic activity for the city through tourism, hospitality, transportation, retail, entertainment, and local businesses. Visitors support hotels, restaurants, attractions, and small businesses across Toronto, while the Carnival creates employment opportunities for artists, musicians, performers, costume



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designers, artisans, event organizers, vendors, and numerous service providers. The festival contributes approximately \$500 million to the provincial economy, supporting more than 3,300 jobs and generating more than \$180 million in combined federal, provincial, and municipal tax revenues.

Toronto Caribbean Carnival is not only a downtown festival; it manifests across the city. The Junior King and Queen Showcase and the Carnival's Launch occur at the Scarborough Town Centre. The Junior Carnival Parade crosses through Malvern in northeast Scarborough. And the King and Queen showcase takes over Allan A. Lamport Stadium in Liberty village. And these are just the official events. There are dozens of other affiliated events that occur as a result of Toronto Caribbean Carnival. From the SOS Festival (Markham, Ontario) which is touted as the city's largest three-day Caribbean music festival with thousands of attendees, to many fetes, concerts, marketplaces, boat cruises, and more. The city comes alive in July with the positivity and jubilation of Caribbean culture playing a significant part.

Recognizing July as Caribbean Heritage Month would provide an important opportunity to celebrate the remarkable history, heritage, cultures, and achievements of people of Caribbean origin while fostering greater understanding and appreciation among all Torontonians. Such recognition would affirm the City's longstanding commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and multiculturalism.

The month of July holds particular significance for Toronto's Caribbean community. It is a time when thousands of residents and visitors participate in festivals, concerts, exhibitions, educational programs, sporting events, culinary experiences, and cultural celebrations that showcase the rich traditions of the Caribbean. Throughout the month, communities from across the English-, French-, Spanish-, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean proudly celebrate their unique histories while highlighting the shared values of resilience, creativity, unity, and cultural exchange.

A formal declaration would also recognize the profound historical relationship between Toronto and Caribbean communities. Generations of Caribbean immigrants have contributed to the growth and prosperity of our city, strengthening its workforce, enriching its cultural institutions, and helping build inclusive neighbourhoods where diversity is celebrated as one of Toronto's defining strengths.

Furthermore, proclaiming July as Caribbean Heritage Month would provide valuable opportunities for education and dialogue. It would encourage residents, schools, businesses, and community organizations to learn about the Caribbean's rich history, including the enduring contributions of Indigenous peoples, African descendants, South Asian indentured labourers, Chinese, Portuguese, Syrian-Lebanese, and many other communities whose histories collectively shaped the modern Caribbean. Such recognition reflects the diversity that exists both within the Caribbean and within Toronto itself.

The declaration of July as Caribbean Heritage Month would therefore recognize not only the historical and cultural legacy of Caribbean Canadians, but also their continuing contributions to Toronto's prosperity, innovation, and international reputation as one of the world's most diverse and welcoming cities.



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As Toronto continues to champion inclusion and belonging, officially recognizing July as Caribbean Heritage Month would demonstrate the City's appreciation for the lasting contributions of Caribbean Canadians while inspiring future generations to celebrate their heritage with pride and confidence.

We respectfully encourage Toronto City Council to adopt a declaration recognizing July as Caribbean Heritage Month and to continue supporting initiatives that celebrate the history, culture, and contributions of Caribbean communities throughout our city.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership in fostering a city where every community is recognized, valued, and celebrated.

Sincerely,

Ryan Singh
Chair, Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association