

## **African Ancestral Acknowledgement**

With the creation of the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism ("CABR") Unit, this African Ancestral Acknowledgement was introduced by the CABR Unit in May 2018. This African Ancestral Acknowledgement is a voluntary recognition offered to support Black staff wishing to use it to acknowledge their ancestors of African descent who have been present and actively contributing to life on Treaty lands and traditional Indigenous territories since the early 1600s.

*The City of Toronto acknowledges all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past - and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.*

### **Objectives and Guidance**

An African Ancestral Acknowledgement draws from the centuries-old and ongoing practice within countless communities of African descendant peoples of opening meetings, gatherings and events by recognizing ancestors past who lived, struggled and died to enable their descendants to survive and sustain themselves, their families and communities. It is also a ceremonial expression of thanks. It draws from the ancient tradition of African libations, where many African communities open meetings by pouring fresh water onto the soil (or if indoors, into a live plant) while calling the names of their ancestors. This calling of ancestors through libations is a ceremony that serves as a solemn request for the spiritual presence, guidance, protection and wisdom of the ancestors to support good intentions and the positive conduct of affairs of African people, families and communities. The African Ancestral Acknowledgement discussed here can be considered a 'dry libation', in that it does not include pouring fresh water onto the ground or into a plant. However, the Ancestral Acknowledgement still draws on this tradition of libations as a life-giving and life-affirming community practice for supporting the well-being of Black communities today.

African Ancestral Acknowledgements are used to open meetings, gatherings and events. However, or whenever it is conducted, the aim, spirit and intention is solemn recognition and reflection, an expression of gratitude, and request for guidance and wisdom that has helped people of African descent survive and thrive through the ages, including through some of modern history's most traumatic generational injustices that have been faced by members of the human family.

African Ancestral Acknowledgements offer a point of reflection on the past, provide context for the present challenges faced by Black communities, and support a desire for a hopeful future for people of African descent. In this way, these acknowledgements are not just about honouring the past, but also about recognizing the continued struggle of people of African descent for freedom, justice and the enjoyment of collective community well-being.

Just like any community practice, custom or tradition, African Ancestral Acknowledgements are not universal across African populations. These Acknowledgements are not rigidly limited to one format. This means that there is no single or standard way that they *must* be done. They are optional for people and communities of African descent to use as a way to recognize and honour African ancestors and traditions of community, struggle and resilience that they represent.

### **Who Should Deliver the African Ancestral Acknowledgement?**

The present African Ancestral Acknowledgement is intended to be delivered by a person of African descent who connects their historical lineage, heritage and ancestry to the victims and survivors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery.

While the African Ancestral Acknowledgement is a voluntary recognition offered and intended to be delivered by Black staff wishing to use it to acknowledge their ancestors of African descent, staff who do not identify as people of African descent are welcome to adapt the language and spirit of it. Staff who do not identify as Black are encouraged to do this in a manner that respectfully recognizes the role that Black people have played and continue to play in contributing to life and well-being on these lands. This should only be done in a way that is thoughtful, authentic and respectful of Black people, culture, histories and heritage.

Having intentional and sincere conversations with a range of Black community stakeholders with whom the individual or staff team already has existing relationships, Black City staff members, the Black Staff Network, and/or the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit is strongly recommended to support culturally appropriate ways of conducting this acknowledgement.

An example of how this Acknowledgement can be appropriately adapted to be delivered by a non-Black member of staff is as follows:

*Though I am not a person of African descent, I am committed to continually acting in support of and in solidarity with Black communities seeking freedom and reparative justice in light of the history and ongoing legacy of slavery that continues to impact Black communities in Canada. As part of this commitment, I would also like to acknowledge that not all people came to these lands as migrants and settlers. Specifically, I wish to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. In support of the City of Toronto's ongoing efforts to confront anti-Black racism, I pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.*

### **African Ancestral Acknowledgements and Reconciliation**

It is important to recognize that an African Ancestral Acknowledgement and an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement are two separate and distinct recognitions. The African Ancestral

Acknowledgement should not be read, delivered or considered an add-on to Land Acknowledgements or merged with them.

Where a meeting, event, or gathering is to open with both a Land Acknowledgement and an African Ancestral Acknowledgement, the Land Acknowledgement should be offered first. After this is completed, it is then appropriate have the Ancestral Acknowledgement follow.

To provide clarity and ensure respect for Indigenous Peoples of this land and ongoing efforts towards reconciliation, it is advised that two different people offer these respective acknowledgements. If it is decided that the same person will offer the Land Acknowledgement and the Ancestral Acknowledgement, the person delivering these should very clearly give a few seconds of a reflective pause following the delivery of the Land Acknowledgement. The individual should then note that they will now offer a separate and additional Ancestral Acknowledgement. It is important that these acknowledgements be delivered in a way that clearly conveys that they are distinct, and they should always be delivered in manner that appropriately respects that they honour two distinct though interconnected peoples, histories, and commitments to justice.

There are, of course, many individuals who identify as having both Indigenous and African ancestry. These individuals should be supported to deliver the Land and/or Ancestral acknowledgement(s) in a manner that feels best and most appropriate to how they determine they would like to honour the people of this land and that individual's Indigenous and African ancestry.

## **The City Supports Acknowledgement with Action**

This acknowledgement and guidance document is part of the City's ongoing and deepening efforts to address anti-Black racism to repair, enhance and create a more equitable relationship between the City and Toronto's diverse Black communities. As such, this acknowledgement is only as meaningful and valuable as the actions it accompanies to confront anti-Black racism at a personal, institutional and systemic level within the City of Toronto and beyond.

## **Background**

With the creation of the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism ("CABR") Unit, this African Ancestral Acknowledgement was introduced by the CABR Unit in May 2018.

Though the presence of people of African descent on these lands did not begin with the enslavement of Black people, the majority of the time that there has been a presence of African people on Treaty lands has been significantly impacted by the practice and legacy of legalized enslavement of Black people, including in Canada, from the 1600s to present.

The United Nations reports that over the course of 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were kidnapped, sold and enslaved as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The

Treaty Lands covered by the City of Toronto were sites that were an integral part of this global network of ports and lands that supported and benefited from the tragic trade and forced labour of African people as units of property.

The African Ancestral Acknowledgement is informed by conversations and consultations with African and Indigenous elders, leaders and community members, as well as staff and leadership of the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto recognizes that endemic, direct and systemic anti-Black racism continue to create significant barriers to the enjoyment of these rights and aspirations of Toronto's Black communities.

The City of Toronto [officially recognized](#) the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), which has as its theme "Recognition, Justice and Development". In the spirit of this recognition, the CABR unit has developed and supports use of this acknowledgement in accordance with the guidance offered in this document.