



Inquiry into hate in the pandemic: Hearing transcript

Transcription prepared by BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

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Presenting organizations: Global Access and Inclusion Foundation (GAIF)

GAIF attendees: Kwaku Yeboah, Millicent Mabi

BCOHRC¹ attendees: Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender, Sarah Khan, Carly Hyman, Emily Chan

Please note that third-party personal information has been removed from this transcript.

[Introductory comments by Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender not included in transcript.]

Kwaku Yeboah: Hello, thank you. My name is Kwaku Yeboah. And I'm actually the founder and president for Global Access and Inclusion Foundation. And I'm speaking from the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam people, on whose land I live, work and play. And I would like to introduce you to Millicent Mabi who is CEO of Global Access and Inclusion Foundation. Millicent is also recent researcher, so I think she will talk about research she did at UBC.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak with you here. It's very important that we get to share specifically what we do, but also what we've experienced the past two years with the work we do.

Global Access and Inclusion Foundation. It's a community not-for-profit, it's not a charity, it's just a community not-for-profit that utilizes evidence-based approach to support marginalized populations in improving the quality of life. It's sort of a blend between knowledge translation and the social determinants of health organization, so we really do provide access to resource, navigating support systems, utilizing diverse and innovative pathways to really achieve those outcomes. Most of our work revolves around food security, health literacy, information literacy for

¹ BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

youth, children, and adults. And with a deliberate focus however on BIPOC population. So Blacks, Indigenous and Persons of Colour. That's what the organization is about.

And before I continue with the work we've done and answer the questions, I'll give you opportunity for Millicent to also introduce herself.

Millicent Mabi: Thank you very much, Kwaku. It's very nice to meet all of you. I come to you today from the unceded territory of the hənq̓əminəm' speaking people.

As Kwaku said, I am the CEO of Global Access and Inclusion Foundation, and I've also been doing research. I'm a researcher and my work has focused largely on BIPOC people and Black people more recently. And all the issues and racism we may encounter in the Canadian society, we just we may know [?] is more systemic than overt, so my research has been covered a lot of these by speaking directly with the people experiencing them. And so I bring some of this research into the work that we do at Global Access so that we can directly address some of the issues that exist out there, which makes us very unique also, because we have access to this population that can be difficult to access for both research and service provision. And so being able to hear from them directly and design interventions that address their unique situation has been a great [inaudible], including during this pandemic, because their voices haven't really come out during this pandemic. They are a very small but visible minority. Also they tend to be missing in service design, service provision, and all of the other supports available.

So I will welcome Kwaku to talk a little bit more before I go into the PowerPoint presentation.

Kwaku Yeboah: First of all what we have seen, as Millicent said, just to echo that, is that especially for the BIPOC population, the Black population in BC, we are just one percent here in the province. So most of the time the hate we tend to see is very, very significant, but because we're such a small population here, it's completely not acknowledged. And obviously there are challenges that we do see in our communities and we've designed interventions to help with that. But we, the biggest portion of it, which Millicent, will get into it in detail, has been very systemic. Discriminatory practices. And unfortunately, extremely difficult and challenging words and phrases that we can't necessarily say here.

So to answer the questions - the first question: has your organization seen a rise in hate? Absolutely, we've seen significant rise of hate towards Black women in particular, Black youth, immigrant populations, especially those in low income.

Over 80% of people we serve and support are Blacks and Indigenous women with children. So earlier I stated that we utilized diverse pathways. So our food security program is a culturally appropriate food security program that we have, that we're serving over - because of the pandemic now, we've gone from serving 240 families to over 4,000 families in a month.

We are pushing out over 25 to 40,000 kilograms of food every single month. But the food is just a pathway. What we're actually really dealing with is issues like hate. Because through the food we're able to gather, but we're able to also get to hear from people themselves, communities that people wouldn't go to. You know, we serve culturally appropriate food so from halal to African to



Indigenous food to kosher foods and what we are hearing from the people we serve is quite despicable.

You know, extremely strong words and extremely, you know, in a way even words that are quite violent, if you say. But most importantly is also the systemic micro, and I wouldn't call it micro aggression, but macro aggression hate. Especially in the workplace, you know, comments that are passed, words that are used. Unfortunately, people have been throwing the N words and assuming that it's OK. And people - we are we all colleagues now, so you should accept it, because COVID is here now.

Or unfortunately because, you know we're dealing with a very dominant other cultures here, especially of East Asian descent, and you guys are just a little piece of people here, you don't even have to say anything, we're doing you a favor by calling you the N-word, because you have a work or you have a job. You know... BIPOC People have lost jobs [more] than any other population during the pandemic. And people were told to, you know what? Just take a handout, go take CERB or whatever that offering that came from the federal government and go home. You'll be OK. You know stuff like that.

So we have seen a significant hate in so many diverse ways. I mean, it was so bad that myself, and Millicent had to even join a coalition with the Jewish CIJA, the Centre for Jewish Affairs, and a few other organisations here to come up with a coalition that we've been, you know, pushing for policies here in the City of Richmond and also in Vancouver. Just to really highlight the concept of what hate is doing in our community.

So I would let Millicent really answer the specific questions, but I will say this clearly. As someone that has been on the ground since before the pandemic, because we were serving food already and helping our communities out. Going from 250 families to 4000 and change families with 80% of them being Black and Indigenous women, children, and youth. It's significant.

And the only variable right now that we do know, whether it's a confounding variable or a variable that is known, is COVID.

You know we've had - last year, I attended 12 funerals of youth, of Black youth committing suicide. That none of whom was even published or spoken about. And these kids had notes of being bullied at school, being spoken at in different ways. You know, being told that they don't belong here, Canadian kids. I have youth that are sitting at home now, afraid to go to school.

Because of course we employ over 15 youth now from various low income communities to deliver these food services from the very communities that they're coming. We're hearing so much of hate. We're hearing that it's gotten so bad that it's now we're even seeing self-hate, with an increase in intimate partner violence within the communities that we serve.

So it's been problem. It's been significant. It's been *completely* not looked at because we don't have a voice. We don't have - to answer some of the questions that will come up later and Millicent will do it. We don't have a voice, we don't have an organized place where to go to report crimes. We do not know - there are literacy challenges. There is most importantly, trust issues. Where you know BIPOC people don't trust any system to go through and make a report of hate because it's like:



what would be done, what they do? They will do nothing. And I don't even want to speak to the police. I don't want to speak to a community organization.

So it's been strong. It's been extremely challenging and COVID has really exacerbated the quality of life through hate of the people that we serve and we see this every single day. And we have so much data, some of the stories are sad for me to share.

So I will leave it to Millicent now to really answer the direct questions and so you can get a good sense of what is happening in our communities. Thank you.

Millicent Mabi: I'm going to very quickly go through the PowerPoint slides. Kwaku has touched on a number of what I was going to talk about. So in the want of time, I'm going to just very briefly go through the slides so we can get to the Q&A.

And so we talked about how we walk with some vulnerable and marginalized populations, including the BIPOC community, and also how we've seen an increase, definitely, in hate crimes as a result of the pandemic, including systemic racism, embedded in employment and access to resources as well.

And just talk about this a little bit more. It's quite tricky for the black and BIPOC population because sometimes these systemic issues are unintentional. For example, requiring certain immigration statuses to access certain types of support acts to exclude people who actually need those services the most. For example, being a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

The pandemic has come to reduce some people to certain other people. For example, the needs that people have had such as food and access to resources, has come to stay in this pandemic. However, some people are necessarily or maybe unnecessarily being denied access to the support they need because they don't have eligible statuses to receive them.

The community has become generally less tolerant of immigrants and newcomers. And this has really gotten worse in the pandemic, starting with anti-Asian rhetoric and then to the Black people. The risk of Black People have always been there, with or without a pandemic. It has only gotten worse in this pandemic.

Racial minorities such as Blacks and BIPOC people were more likely to lose their jobs. For example, some of them didn't have appropriate childcare, and so once exposures happened, women, Black women, were more likely to lose their jobs. Some of them didn't have the social support system that people of larger ethnic groups or even Canadian women could have. And so some of them necessarily had to quit their jobs and stay home.

And this, Blacks are always known to live below the poverty line. Even when they work. And so when they are not working, the rate of poverty is just over the roof, which makes them more reliant on the social systems, causing more hate from people who already think Black people don't work and they just take money from the government.



And so in terms of the things that could have been done. Probably supporting employers earlier on during the pandemic to move to remote work may have saved some of the jobs that Black women lost and even some Black men.

And educating Black people and BIPOC people about their rights and responsibilities as Canadians. But more of them shy away from reporting hate incidents because they think it could come with consequences. For example, maybe they won't be able to secure a job later if people know that they reported a hate incident, or any formal social consequences that it may have.

And so providing a [?] literacy where government works to promote cultural literacy and cultural advocacy in the community could be something else that can help.

Canada is a very multicultural society. However, it's very sad to see the level of systemic and overt racism that goes on in this same society, where we're supposed to thrive on the diversity that immigrants bring.

And ensuring that some newcomers to Canada did not fall through the cracks of government support. During the pandemic, Black people were more likely than others to fall through the cracks of all the support. So they sent all the money going around, but a lot of the populations we serve didn't get them, and this put them at a really great risk of not having food.

Thankfully, we were there with all the food we provided and delivered directly to them. And it's important to note, from a government perspective, the policy perspective, that although all immigrants share similar characteristics, when it comes to Black people, they are unique in certain ways, including their skin colour, the accent that they come with. I've come to see through my research that some accents are more acceptable than others. So yes, there are other accents in Canada, but some of them are just - they don't know [?] - when it comes to receiving support or integrating into the workplace and society. And the Black accent is one of those.

And how we responded to issues of hate during this pandemic? We increased our food delivery and supplies, including taking the food to people in their homes, people who are facing different barriers to mobility, such as immunocompromised people, people who don't have the means of going around, such as being able to afford the bus fare. And also, we assisted people to apply for government aid and support.

Black people and BIPOC people generally do not know about what support is available in the community. They are very small in number. And so information that would traditionally circulate among Canadians and among the larger ethnic communities, the Black and BIPOC people miss out on this. The result being that they don't know what's available for them or how to access them. And so we stepped in and we were able to educate people about what forms of support were available. Then we went beyond that, to actually support them to apply for these.

And we also provided resources to support mental health, because people were going through a lot. From losing their jobs to the pandemic to being at home when there was an increase in intimate partner violence. People were experiencing a lot of mental health issues. And so we're able to educate them about resources and connect them with other community resources that they did not know about.



And different types of Black people, such as the Muslim people, they have preferences for the kinds of food and groceries, such as wanting halal food. And so we were able to meet those specific needs because we were embedded in the community. And so we understood what they wanted and provided them the way that it met their needs.

And also I'm training youth through work experience and career training to be able to get back into the workforce. Some of them want to support their parents. Some of them to built up their own career. But we provided that support to help them get into the employment sector. And we generally assisted people to navigate systems which can be really complex even for the educated, let alone people who have different levels of education and literacy.

In terms of services and mechanisms to report hate incidents. I really don't see or as an organization during this pandemic, we didn't see any such support that addressed the unique circumstances of the BIPOC community. A lot of the very small available services took this one-size-fits-all approach where they assume that everybody knew about these services, everybody knew how to access them, or how to report hate crimes. But that wasn't the case for the BIPOC community.

They didn't know how to exercise their rights, how to report. They actually do not trust the system because if they are recording [?], would their reports be taken seriously, would there be any consequences to them? And so I think some level of literacy about how to do these things safely, and some assurances, which will talk about down in this presentation. And so there was generally limited support that targeted and addressed the unique circumstances of BIPOC people.

Anything else we'd like to add and recommendations - definitely. First of all, it will be important to create ways that are easy to report hate incidents. People experience these things. However, if the gap between where and when they experience it to how and when they need to report it is very huge, people may give up on the reporting. And so making it easier for people who decide to and actually making it easier for people to consider reporting these incidents. As well as empowering BIPOC community, racial minorities and vulnerable populations to report this incident, by first educating them that they can report safely without any consequences to their jobs, to their children, to their ability to remain in Canada.

These are some of the barriers that prevent people from reporting. And also ongoing relationship building with vulnerable communities so that they can feel safe and trust this system to report these hate incidents.

Because the truth is the hate incidents towards Black of BIPOC community before the pandemic, they have gotten worse during the pandemic, and they will continue after the pandemic. However, what we don't know is what shape the hate incidents will take post-pandemic. Despite not knowing, I believe that we can plan towards those by taking statistics and looking at what things were before the pandemic and what they are now to project into the future.

And so for example, creating deliberate information literacy and system navigation training for BIPOC populations would be a great help. So that they become aware of resources available, how to access them, how to safely report, and how to generally stay safe from the hate crime around them and hate incidents.



Thank you very much. And I'm going to stop sharing my screen now and Kwaku and I are happy to take questions.

Kwaku Yeboah: Thank you so much, Millicent. Just a quick wrap up. From all that we put out there. I think the overall synopsis of it is, the hate that we experienced in the community was really embedded micro aggression in all forms. People were denied access. I know hands down people that wouldn't even, they weren't even given vaccines, because of the fact that they were women wearing hijabs and culturally, it's like, OK, you speak with an accent. So what do you mean? We can't hear you. Click.

And I've been there, I've supported people, Millicent has been there. We've heard so many things, we've experienced so much, that it's embedded in the micro aggression. What is really worst of it for me, in this case, for us as an organization is that it is so polite and so subliminal that anybody would turn a blind eye to it and wouldn't necessarily see how that is impacting the community. But when you go for, when you attend 12 funerals of youth committing suicide and all of whom had written notes about feeling isolated and not feeling like they belong. When you have even when you have even [?] two parents with kids under 10 years old, who wouldn't want to go to school because your friends are calling them names and all that kind of stuff. These are kids.

It's real. But we're such a small population that nobody appears to care! Nobody appears to even see that we go through this every single day. And that is where the biggest problem. We don't have a voice. Our voice doesn't even matter. We are not the majority of the population here. So everything, just sweep it under the carpet, as if nothing exists. And this the practical realities we are dealing with. Through the food, through the career development, through the youth and mental health stuff, this is the practical reality of it.

So thank you once again for the opportunity.

Sarah Khan: Would it be possible for you to share your presentation with us, the written version? So we can have it on file as part of the information gathering for the inquiry.

Kwaku Yeboah: Yes, please, we will be able to.

Sarah Khan: I was also wondering about... Where – and I apologize if you answered this and I wasn't – so just to clarify, where are the communities that you're serving? Are they primarily in the Metro Vancouver area? Are you also serving communities outside of Metro Vancouver?

Kwaku Yeboah: Yeah, yes please. So we started off at Richmond, and we then went into Metro Vancouver because everybody heard that they come to ask for support. So presently we have about 28 different partners and now we are actually almost provincial. We have Indigenous communities in Kamloops. We have Black populations in Nanaimo and Victoria that we ship food to. We provide supports to also navigating systems. We have people that have come all the way, organizations that have come all the way from Prince George and Fort St. John now coming in for some sort of help. So we've gone from once again, small - serving 229 families, 250 families to over 4,000, so we are provincial, yes please. Whoever comes for help, we just find a way to support.



Sarah Khan: Thank you, I was also wondering if you... the incidents of racism and hate that you have recounted, are you documenting those anywhere right now? Are you, or collecting information, for example, in any kind of deidentified way or anonymous way? And if so, if there's any way to share that information with us. If you think that doesn't breach any consent or privacy, confidentiality, that you might have with the people who provided those reports to you.

Kwaku Yeboah: We might have to obviously speak to the people that provided us that information, but what I can tell you is we will be able to contact them. This is everyday story. The beauty of you know even food security or food insecurity is that for us culturally it's so appropriate, it brings people together. This is the only time we've had people really sharing. You know, talking. We just will be able to talk to them and hopefully we get some consent but, every single day we hear something. Every single day. And we will be able to connect you with some of the people that we support also. So you could even have direct engagements with them. So yes, we can arrange that.

Sarah Khan: [Information about the public survey]

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Thanks. Sarah. Just following up, actually you covered off some of what I was going to ask, Sarah, but do you have any stats on what you've seen around, you mentioned you've definitely seen an increase, not just mentioned, focused on the fact that you've definitely seen an increase over this time in hate, including gender-based violence. And I wondered if you had any numbers to back it up or that's more as you talked about, more your everyday experience about hearing from people.

Kwaku Yeboah: Millicent will be able to talk on this. Yes we do. We have, once again, families, lists, people that we transition out every day. We collect data on the foods that go out, people that it goes to, who they already live, conditions or situations surrounding them. And the one - I'm glad you really bring it up, because that particular piece, for me, has been one of the things that I touched on - I think Millicent will speak on it a little bit more. That we've now seen that even within our community, the hate within, you know, increase in the gender-based... It's so much.

We've transitioned over 28 families in just less than three months, into transitional homes. Right. And these are people, who maybe they were going through it before, but when we talk, when they talk, it's gotten worse to the point that now they need help.

So it's not just the hate from different ethnicities or religious backgrounds, but also internally, just even within ourselves. The gender piece. The youth in particular, and the hate that has - everybody seems to be upset or angry. That has been our work and what we are still working on now. Until we got support from Canadian Women Foundation actually to do that, so we do collect data and we will be able to set up to share that.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: That would be that would be wonderful, thank you. We'd really appreciate that. I wondered if you had thoughts about. Why? Why this increase? I mean, you know it's a big part of what we're trying to figure out here. Why the increase during COVID? And again, including gender-based violence, but also the racial hate that you've talked about. Can you speak to that at all?



Millicent Mabi: Yeah. I'll just jump in here. So the increase has been due to a number of things. COVID was imported from elsewhere and so that alone started some hatred towards immigrants generally. And so, it has always been there, but the pandemic came to make it worse. And so Black people, for example. That's why there was a need for Black Lives Matter in the first place, because there has been something going on in a way that sometimes you really can't put your finger to it. And so, for example, when I spoke to people who were experiencing discrimination in the workplace. Some of them stuck to their jobs because they knew it wasn't easy to get another job with a Black skin and so they continued in those jobs. Those who were brave enough to lose those jobs, to quit because of the discrimination. They weren't eligible for employment insurance because they quit. And there's nothing to protect somebody, to provide income to someone who leaves their job for issues of racism and discrimination, at least nothing that I know of.

And so these people are immediately plunged into poverty, which they didn't move far from anyway. Because Black people, despite their qualifications and all they bring, they tend to be very lowly employed. I mean, in precarious conditions where they're under-compensated. And so the community generally doesn't look favorably to people who are in such situations. They are seen as takers. People who always come to take from Canadians, from the government. And with the pandemic, Black people have had to quit their jobs to either take care of their children, which made it more difficult to secure other jobs, especially with having a Black skin and African sounding name. It just got really worse.

And when I spoke to these people, I've continued to speak with them, but one thing that kept coming out. They want a change. They want that conditions to improve. They want this racism to reduce if it can't completely go away. Which is why I was really very pleased about this initiative that you are conducting and doing because I believe and I trust that it will bring the change that they are looking for. And so I'm very excited about it. And I believe that in January when you send us that link to share with the community, I trust it will get positive response because they trust us and we trust you. They really do want a change in their situation and we are that conduit between you, the government, and this community. And we are here availing ourselves to see that this situation is improved.

Kwaku Yeboah: And I just want to briefly also say just a quick question. I think the income, you know the social determinant piece was a huge factor, income. Not being able to really access resources. And then the huge transference of anti Asian rhetoric. There was no any other population to go through, I guess, than the BIPOC. So after all the whole rhetoric of you know, the Asians, they did this, they did that. They just extended to you know the BIPOC population, vicariously or not, really no one knows.

I mean I know people that have concussions from just walking around and being punched and running away. And you know that they don't even know where to report it. And these are highly educated people. You know? I can pull people that had been, know their rights. They experience things like this. They don't talk about it.

I can speak on my own personal experiences, where you know, I personally, would let you know provincially, I do a lot of work provincially and federally also. And you know, I've heard some of the worst possible things, and despite having access to almost all the best resources. I'm friends with



RCMP Chiefs and whatnot. I chose not even for some reason I chose to not share this experience with them, not even report it, just because what will come out of it? But I took my experiences to use it to educate and put effort into the people that I serve because there are communities depending on us and to offer us, to also help them. So how do you go back to the very community that is depending on you to say that you are also experiencing possibly the same thing.

So the determinant piece, the income, the poverty, the accent. You don't speak English. You're wearing this. You're Black. You eat animals and bats and bushmeat. And we've heard worse.

Millicent Mabi: So one of the people we serve reported that you know when they walked someone told them you should go back to Africa. I've been here since before you were born, you know he was doing this, you know security job and his job was to ask people to leave certain places that they shouldn't be. And you know these kinds of reports of people telling to, people being told to go back to where they came from, or people being told blatantly that they're illiterate because people don't understand their accents. And so speaking with an accent is translated to being dumb. People are assumed to be dumb and they are more supervised even in the workplace for speaking with an accent.

And these experiences they don't share it externally. They share within this small community. And so you really have to be embedded in that community to be able to tap into what's going on.

So that's what we've had the privilege of being part of, to hear these stories first hand. Otherwise, they circulate within the small community, they don't go up, nobody reports it. But they're there, and they're happening. And people don't trust the authorities or the systems to go to that.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Absolutely, that actually leads me to my final question, which is, you suggested, Millicent, I think it was you who suggested creating easy options to, easier options, to report hate incidents. You had it in one of your slides. By that do you mean easier options to report to police? Or are you thinking of other reporting possibilities?

Millicent Mabi: Thank you very much. That's a really great question. First of all, the BIPOC community is very wary of the police. Because they come from different environments where engagement with the police can mean a lot of different things. And so the police may not be the first they would go to. And for some people, if the police is the only place they would go to, they would rather not report it. And so the police is one place for sure for people who are comfortable, who I guess are very few. However, if there are other options that are easily accessible to people, be that an organization or some app that people can download on their phones to immediately, on the spot, tap on, such as an app, and report an incident or some way that is very easy and mobile for people. Right now, I really don't know a lot of places where people can report, which is one of the things we talked about on the Stop Racism Coalition. How and where do people go to report these things? None of us had a concrete answer on that committee. Because there isn't really enough, there isn't really anything concrete in place.

And so something that is easily accessible to people, maybe on their mobile devices, or a hotline or something. But maybe the police can be an but not the only option. Because that will continue to exclude people who are wary of the police and the BIPOC community is definitely such people.



Commissioner Kasari Govender: Great.

Kwaku Yeboah: I will also just concur quickly. Kasari, I think this is why your Office to me is very, very important. That you know BIPOC people really have come from traumatic experiences. We cannot ignore that, some of them or if not most of them, especially those we serve in lower income populations that you know hearing human rights they believe in it, they trust it. Because that's the sort of background and an environments they came from. You know for lack of better words, they were helped or supported to even get here, some of them, by human right activist and great people within this country that have done that. So if there is a way that will be in your portfolio that there will be, like what Millicent is describing, an access to – because if I live in the community, the low income community in Richmond here or Surrey, and I know that the Human Rights Commissioner of BC have a reporting line where you can report a hate crime of some sort or discriminatory practices, be rest assured I will go there and I will promote it.

So I think this is an opportunity for your Office to be really engaging and creative and really getting access to real life data. You know, real truth, practical stories and things that are happening on the ground that wouldn't [?]. I could tell you numerous stories you know, by the way, why they wouldn't go to the police. I've had to defend youth against police for just walking and doing nothing, just being Black or East Indian or whatever the case is. So that's a good opportunity for you.

