

April 27, 2021

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Subject: Submission on Bill C-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy to redress environmental racism

Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development,

Breast Cancer Action Quebec is a feminist, environmental health organization dedicated to the prevention of breast cancer, with a particular focus on environmental factors linked to the disease. We are deeply concerned with social inequalities of health that have their root causes in widespread structures of environmental racism. **We therefore urge the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to approve Bill C-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy to redress environmental racism, without delay.**

Starting in 2015, we at Breast Cancer Action Quebec witnessed the emergence of research on important disparities in breast cancer trends among women from racialized and/or immigrant communities compared to white women.ⁱ Of particular concern are the breast cancer trends among Black women in the United States and the United Kingdom where women from black ethnic groups have higher mortality rates than white women. As well, Black women are diagnosed with more aggressive forms of the disease for which treatments are much more limited.ⁱⁱ

At the same time, other research was emerging on the unequal burden of toxic exposures for Black women and women of color, in particular due to higher amounts of toxic substances in personal care products and cosmetics that are developed and marketed to them.ⁱⁱⁱ This issue is just one small example of the interconnected root causes of health injustices faced by racialized groups.

Further, Canada does not collect race-based health data, so we do not have a clear portrait of racialized health trends, although researchers in Canada think it is very probable that Black women and women of color are facing the same health issues here and are calling on Health Canada to collect the necessary race-based data.^{iv} The lack of race-based health data in Canada is a major structural obstacle preventing racialized communities from being able to identify the causes of the harms they are experiencing and to start working for the necessary changes that would lead to environmental health justice.

The social health injustices due to environmental racism are thickly layered. They are often rooted in geographies of environmental racism in which are embedded complicated racist social norms and structures of consumption. The results of this environmental racism are greater harms and mortality to people from specific racialized and immigrant groups as well as First Nations.

We strongly encourage the federal government to adopt Bill C-230 quickly. Canada needs to start the process of catching up with other countries on collecting the necessary data and producing much needed research so that we have a clear portrait of the environmental health issues racialized communities are facing. The government needs to then report on these findings and develop actionable, funded plans to respond to the findings. All of this is what Bill C-230 would require. The adoption of the Bill and the development of a Strategy on Environmental Racism would mark an historic step forward in Canada's commitment to seriously take on environmental racism. Finally, it would work in conjunction with the proposed reform to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and its new framework for the right to a healthy environment.

Canada has the chance to make a fundamental change to the inaction of the past on these major issues for First Nations and racialized communities. For too long, we have allowed major environmental health injustices to continue to grow. Passing Bill C-230 would be the start of turning the tide towards greater environmental health justice for all.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Beeman, Executive Director

Breast Cancer Action Quebec

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^{iv} Geetanjali Datta, Arjumand Siddiqi and Aisha Lofters. Transforming race-based health research in Canada. *CMAJ* January 18, 2021 193 (3) E99-E100.

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