

*The community was assisted with writing this impact statement by the African Canadian Legal Clinic who convened a Community Roundtable on May 14, 2007 with representatives from five community organizations.*

## **COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

We are representatives of African Canadian and other racial community organizations in Kitchener Waterloo.

We are here to tell you that the racist hate attack near Victoria Park did not only affect the victims. We all felt it. When the attack happened last July, we were shocked, outraged and afraid. It was shameful that such a terrible inhumane incident happened in Kitchener. We continue to be fearful and frustrated. For us the attack was even more alarming and upsetting because 5 years ago another Black man was killed in the same park and we had worked hard to get justice. This time, Francis was nearly killed and again the Black community was the target of this racist violent attack.

**This crime had a profound impact on our community's lifestyle.** Our lifestyles have changed by this terrible anti-Black hate attack. We started questioning again, is this park a safe place to bring our family and friends? Victoria Park after sundown is out of bounds for us. We are afraid of being attacked. This hate crime happened close to home. Many of us can't avoid the park to get to work. We feel trapped knowing that this hateful crime occurred so close to our families. We have been put on high alert and worry.

We do not feel safe. We are more cautious when we are walking down the street or going about on our regular business. Before the crime many of us would walk, bike and use public transportation. Now we prefer driving or taking taxis. Since the attack, many Black women in our community, in order to feel safe, try to travel with male company.

**This crime has severely weakened our collective identity within the city.** Victoria Park is a part of our heritage and community. Many of us have built memories there – our families, our grandparents and older generations went there. When it became the scene of yet another hate crime, it stole a part of our heritage. We have been excluded from an important piece of our city. It is a real loss that we have to tell our kids to avoid the park.

It has affected our Black youth. We feel that the young Black men in our community are at special risk. This attack confirmed it. It has further marginalized our community and our youth. It is difficult to teach our young people how to manage, how to cope, when this is just one part of the larger problem of racism.

The horror of this crime was worse because Francis has a disability. Because of his disability, he could not escape. He was defenceless and preyed upon. One of our friends in a wheelchair asked the day after the attack, "Am I next?" This crime had a ripple effect throughout the community. The crime was an attack on our community's humanity.

**Since the crime our ability to relate to the wider community and our sense of belonging in the city has changed.** The crime sent a clear message to us all. It said if you are Black, stay away from this park. You are not welcome in this city. It was similar to when Howard Munroe was attacked and killed. It reignited the feelings of being unwanted, of being chased out.

After the hate attack, with the exception of one church group, the failure of the wider community to speak in support of us to condemn the crime was very obvious. We felt devalued, that we were not important enough for others to speak out to support us. This hate crime was not being taken seriously. We thought, what happens the next time? We were silenced by fear.

The silence of the wider community condones the hate crime. After the attack, we heard reports of racial harassment. In one incident, racial slurs were yelled at some young Black men in our community.

The attack for us confirmed the results of a survey done by the City of Kitchener a few years ago which revealed negative feelings in the wider community towards visible minority newcomers. It confirmed how we see this hate crime – as a violent expression of the racism we experience everyday.

The crime sent the message, “who’s next”? It added to our feeling of vulnerability, when we saw the violent acts of racist hate against us. It was a demonstration of how some people felt about many of us as Black people and immigrants in the city.

There is considerable unease out in our community. We see a group of young white males and we wonder if they are like the ones who attacked Francis. We ask, what about that person, is he the same too?

The crime “created a more dangerous and unpredictable situation”. “Whatever levels of comfort we had were gone. We were put back in discomfort”.

**Those of us who recently came to Canada as immigrants or refugees were especially traumatized by the crime in a unique way.** Many of us from the Southern Sudanese community are thankful to be in Canada. We sought refuge here and came with high expectations of freedoms and safety. We had lived through the horrors of a civil war. This crime has shattered the sense of security that we expected in Canada. It has reminded us that as African Canadians we are still not safe. Our young people travel in groups to protect themselves. In the

Sudanese community we also felt shame after the crime, because we did not have the financial resources to fully support Francis and the other victims in their time of need. This crime created great anxiety among immigrants in our community. We felt afraid to report other incidents of racism and hate to the authorities. Some of us as immigrants came to Canada with hopes of freedom and security for us and our families. Many of us have to work late at night. We have had to rethink keeping these jobs since this crime was

committed. We have to live with the fear of this crime. We ask whether we are truly free to live and work in this city.

**The crime has also damaged our relationship with authority figures in Kitchener.** Our faith in our city officials was shaken. When the crime first occurred and there were no immediate arrests, we questioned whether the police cared about Black people. There was no public outrage expressed by city politicians. We were told that this was because the attack happened in the summer. We do not think that this should prevent political leaders from coming out and saying something. There were a few editorials and comments, but not much else. This made us feel unimportant, as if the attack and our lives did not matter because we are Black.

The response of Grand River Transit was really shocking. We heard that when the victims ran there to get help, they were told to get off the station property. To ask someone in uniform for assistance and not get it, that was humiliating. How can it be that they would not help the victim of a hate crime? It sent the message to us that you can ask for help from authority, but it won't necessarily come. It was really disturbing. When we saw the lack of action, it re-enforced our feelings of being defenceless, not having our voices heard by those with the power to effect change and offer protection.

The statements we have made are true to the best of our knowledge.