COUNT US IN: NOVA SCOTIA'S ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT, 2015-2024

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BACKGROUND

The majority of African Nova Scotians (ANS) are the descendants of those who came to the province as: Black Loyalists from America, Trelawny Marrons from Jamaica, refugees from the War of 1812, indentured servants of New England planters, steel and coal miners from the Caribbean and southern United States, or new Canadians from all regions of Africa.

The history and story of African descendant people in Nova Scotia is distinct, celebratory and proud. However, this history is marked with great difficulty, pain and hardship throughout the last 400 years. Since the arrival of persons of African descent to Nova Scotia (circa 1600s), a trust and enduring positive relationship between government and African Nova Scotian communities had not taken root. Each one of the over 48 African Nova Scotian (ANS) communities across the province has faced challenges of racism and negative biases.

ABOUT ANSA

In 2003 the government created African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA). The legislative mandate for ANSA legitimized the government's intention to address issues facing the ANS community.

ANSA works with the provincial government on matters involving African Nova Scotian issues, policies and programs. ANSA's ongoing work covers four strategic areas: government relations, negotiations, community outreach, and communication for public education and awareness. In addition to working with government, ANSA works within the community to keep African Nova Scotians informed and encourages involvement between government and community.

ANSA takes a key role in community initiatives and brings African Nova Scotians together to network, share ideas, and identify opportunities for development and growth.

ANSA plays an active role in all matters relating to government that involve African Nova Scotians and their communities. ANSA's role is diverse and multi-faceted – from providing advice that makes a difference in government decisions, to being involved in the creation and delivery of innovative programs. ANSA helps government better serve African Nova Scotians by:

- strengthening the delivery of services to African Nova Scotians,
- facilitating dialogue between government and community,
- reviewing and providing input on proposed legislation and policy,
- working with African Nova Scotian communities and all levels of government on matters such as developing or unresolved issues, new initiatives, and community programming/celebrations, and
- being an agent for change.

COUNT US IN

When the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed years 2015 to 2024 as the "International Decade for People of African Descent," with the goal to strengthen global cooperation in support of people of African descent as they strive for full inclusion in all aspects of society, Nova Scotia wanted to join this initiative. On May 8th, 2018, Premier Stephen McNeil and African Nova Scotian Affairs Minister Tony Ince proclaimed the "International Decade for People of African Descent" in the province. Nova Scotia was the first and only province in Canada to proclaim the Decade.

On September 19th, 2019, Nova Scotia launched *Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2014*. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations (Geneva, Switzerland); Gloria Nwabuogu, Human Rights Officer, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (Geneva, Switzerland); and Dominque Day, Human Rights Attorney and member of the United Nations Working Group of Experts of People of African Descent (New York, New York) travelled to Nova Scotia to attend the launch. It should be noted Nova Scotia is now the only jurisdiction in North America with an action plan and proclamation dedicated to the International Decade for People of African Descent.

Count Us In is a guiding document designed to provide government with specific actions to help eliminate the many challenges facing African Nova Scotians. It reflects ongoing work and creates opportunities in new and existing ways. A team of Deputy Ministers and an Interdepartmental Working Group champion the action plan, provide leadership, and collaborate with the African Nova Scotian community and community organizations on the progress of the work on a regular basis. The document is a mechanism to facilitate government departments, organizations and the community working together to advance the work of the International Decade. The actions set forth in *Count Us In* are categorized under the three International Decade pillars: Recognition, Justice and Development.

The "Recognition" pillar in the document has initiatives that will enhance the understanding of African Nova Scotian history, celebrate African Nova Scotian heritage, use data and research to understand and combat racism in all its forms, and engage with the African Nova Scotian community to explore what it means to be a distinct group with legal recognition.

The second pillar of "Justice" is will draw on the lessons learned from the past to guide us as we work towards advancing social justice and inclusion polices, fighting racism and intolerance, and promoting human rights. The goals of this pillar call on all Nova Scotians to improve access to a fair and equitable justice system, provide supportive and culturally relevant family and community services, and have conversations with African Nova Scotian communities to redress historic injustice.

For "Development," *Count Us In* is about creating healthier and more prosperous communities. The goals of this pillar are to close the achievement gap in education and promote lifelong learning; promote sustainable inclusive economic participation, including the benefit of quality employment; support health and well-being at all ages; and help communities become more inclusive, safe, connected, resilient and sustainable.

These initiatives are just the beginning for positive change to occur. There are more issues to solve. However, to truly understand how to address these issues and overcome the related harms, we must continue to collaboratively work together to build stronger and just relationships. *Count Us In* is the next step in our journey in creating positive change across Nova Scotia.

We hope all Canadians and people around the world will join and support this journey towards a better future for people of African Descent. We believe in the words of Desmond Tutu "All of our humanity is dependant upon recognizing the humanity in others". To read *Count Us In* or for more information about ANSA or the African Nova Scotian community, please visit https://ansa.novascotia.ca.