INTRODUCTION

Dahabo Ahmed Omer is the Chair of the Federation of Black Canadians and the Director of Operations at the Somali Centre for Family Services. She is the co-founder of the Justice for Abdirahman Coalition which has pushed for changes to law enforcement and the justice system since Abdi's death following his violent arrest in central Ottawa in 2016 and a board member of the Black Agenda Noir organization, a Circle of United Black Citizens whose goal is to cement Black presence on the national radar. She has been the recipient of notable awards over the years including the exceptional service within the Federal Public Service, the Canada150 Community Builder Award, The Hope Academy community contribution award, the Ottawa Black History Community Leadership Award and most recently the top 100 under 40 Most Influential Person of African descent in support of United Nations decade.

As Chair of the Federation of Black Canadians, I am regularly in conversation with activists, leaders, thinkers and the many people who make up the diverse Black communities across this country. I'm therefore glad to have the opportunity to join the 'conversation' taking place in this second volume of *Canadian Diversity*'s special issue on the International Decade for People of African Descent, which has been commissioned by our friends at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

The previous volume was published at the end of February, to mark the closing of Black History Month. I doubt that any of us imagined that so much momentous Black history would be happening in the weeks leading up to the publication of this second volume.

The sad truth, however, is that no one should be surprised at the most recent manifestations of racism. With respect to the pandemic, it's been clear for a very long time that Black Canadians disproportionately experience poverty, environmental racism, and challenges with access to health care. Though we still lack race-based statistics on incidents of COVID-19, we know that these factors play a huge role in the number of Black people contracting the virus.

Nor should we be surprised at yet another incident of police violence against people of African descent. For several years, I co-led the Justice for Abdirahman coalition in Ottawa, which sought sweeping changes to policing and the justice system. Abdirahman Abdi was a 37-year-old Somali-Canadian with mental health issues and no criminal history, who died on July 24, 2016, during a violent altercation with Ottawa Police. With our fellow activists and organizers in the United States, we share the deep sorrow that more continue to die. And we are frustrated by supportive words that don't lead to concrete action.

Diversity and inclusion are not starting points for anti-racism – they are outcomes that result from actively and meaningfully decolonizing your organizational structure and relationships.

The articles for this issue, which were developed prior to the recent events, shed light on what it means to be Black in Canada. The theme of the first issue was *Facing the Change*, which was inspired by James Baldwin's famous quote "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." This volume is inspired by another quote from him: "You write in order to change the world… if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it."

My hope is that as you read these thoughtful papers, you see the world in a different way and take an active role in supporting, investing, learning and helping the Black community prosper.