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Responding to Anti-Asian Racism through community organizing - ACT2EndRacism National Network

Teresa Woo-Paw

Teresa Woo-Paw is the Chair of Action! Chinese Canadians Together-(ACCT) Foundation, and Convener for the ACT2Endracism National Network. She is also the Chair of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and ECA (Executive Council of Alberta) and the first Asian Canadian woman elected as MLA and Cabinet minister.

2020-2021 was an unprecedented time from multiple dimensions. Unprecedented due to a major global pandemic, shifting political landscapes, and also to the marked convergence of all forms of racial discrimination and injustices in Canada. We saw the rise of anti-Asian racism in blatant, deliberate and hateful ways impacting both the physical safety as well as the social and mental well-beings of Canadians of Asian descent.

Racist attitudes, acts and attacks were emboldened by irresponsible, racist political rhetoric and the anonymity of racists on social media. The Canadian public systems' inabilities and inadequate commitments to address racial discrimination over the past decades perpetuated anti-Asian racism not only at the individual level but through institutional and organizational systems. Furthermore, the institutional denial and negligence of anti-Asian racism coalesced with the persistent underrepresentation of Asian Canadians in leadership and decision-making positions and the perceived inability and lack of capacity building for targeted Asian Canadian communities contributed to the storm of anti-Asian racism in Canada.

In March 2020, as Chair of the [ACCT Foundation](#) I convened meetings with organizations and community groups from across Canada to explore ways to respond to rising anti-Asian racism upon contacts from concerned communities and reporting of anti-Asian incidents. Ultimately, the shared belief in a collective voice to pursue responses from national leaders on the attack of the Chief Medical Officer of Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam propelled the formation of the [ACT2EndRacism Network](#) with thirty (30) organizations from five provinces within four weeks. Asian Canadian equity seeking organizations' quick responses reflect the communities' elevated level of concern and sense of urgency.

The ACCT established and supported the ACT2EndRacism National Network with funding from the Government of Canada. The Network is now an entity with over 45 organizational members from 9 provinces.

Members of the ACT2EndRacism National Network

- believe racism is entrenched in Canada's history and present, and is hurting all Canadians
- emphasize collective efforts to eradicate anti-Asian racism in Canada
- recognize and stand with other racialized groups while increasing the awareness of anti-Asian racism
- seek to educate and mobilize our own communities about the impact of this racism, and
- to raise awareness on our own societal contributions and civic leadership.

Core members of the Network met weekly for 2.5 years and organized 15 collaborative community projects including development of community tools and resources to tackle racism; racist incident report-line (text message line in 7 languages); press releases; community outreach, education and consultations; publishing community reports; national awareness campaigns on mental health and racism; launching ACCT's educational videos on anti-Asian stereotypes of the model minorities, yellow peril and perpetual foreigners; Asian Heritage Month's Let's Talk session featuring Chief Commissioner of Canadian Human Rights, the first and only Federal Deputy Minister of Asian descent Mr. Daniel Quan-Watson, Citizenship Judge Hon. Albert Wong, and Founder and Chair of ACCT Foundation Ms. Teresa Woo-Paw; other webinars focused on human rights and employment rights (in 6 languages) as well as sessions on Talking to Kids about racism; a multi-cities International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Solidarity Walk with almost 1000 participants from diverse backgrounds; and, a research project with the University of Calgary on Asian Canadians' experiences of racism and reporting.

The Network continues to be supported by the ACCT Foundation with a focus on building Network capacity because it is widely anticipated that anti-Asian racism will continue in the near future.

In July 2020, Statistics Canada reported that since the beginning of the pandemic, immigrants were (42%) more likely than their Canadian born counterparts (9%) to report that they feared being stigmatized because of their racial identity. Visible minorities were also more likely to perceive an "increase in the frequency of harassment or attacks based on race, ethnicity or skin colour since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (18% vs. 6% for other participants). This percentage was even higher among participants who identified as Chinese (30%), Korean (27%), and Southeast Asian (19%)."

Half of Chinese Canadian respondents to an Angus Reid survey (June 2020) experienced a racist incident due to COVID-19. The Vancouver Police Department reported (February 2021) a 717% increase in hate crimes towards Asian Canadians compared to the same time period in 2019. According to surveys by the Association of Canadian

Studies and Leger (2022), Asian Canadians are more worried about the degree of racism in Canada and are more likely to feel personally attacked on social media.

In the past year, approximately 25% of respondents to the ACT2EndRacism Network Reporting Line requested support. However, when ACT2EndRacism attempted to make external referrals to service providers, including settlement agencies, many were not prepared to assist those who experienced racism. Access to culturally sensitive, trauma informed practice for racism is almost non-existent. The effects of racism experienced by East and Southeast Asian Canadian communities is an area that has been neglected and omitted in public policy, academia, and the service sector.

Another area of challenge is the lack of awareness of the disturbingly high sense of fear amongst Asian Canadians, including being afraid to even pick up community resources on discrimination; let alone reporting their experiences. The ACCT Foundation and ACT2EndRacism Network are collaborating with the University of Calgary to examine the substantive under-reporting of racist and hate incidents by Canadians of Asian descent.

- The Network's strategic direction identified the following objectives moving forward:
- to address anti-Asian racism in Canada through collaboration and a collective voice;
- to provide anti-racism resources/ tools/supports for communities, general public and also for targets of racism;
- to monitor hate incidents/crimes through a national reporting line and text messaging system;
- to engage government to exercise their responsibility to protect the safety and security of all Canadians; and
- to influence public policy and affect systemic change.

The collaborations of the ACCT Foundation and the ACT2EndRacism Network continue with ongoing community outreach and strengthening working relationships with members from across Canada especially the Prairies and Atlantic Canada. Core members of the Network expressed strong interests and commitments to the building of the coalition focusing on multi-region and multi-ethnic collaborative projects that help to inform and address the complex needs of the diverse Asian Canadian communities through community capacity building and systemic change.

Members of the ACT2EndRacism Network are acutely aware that the answer to substantively address racism is through systemic change in public institutions. Moving forward the Network's priority will focus on our role in anti-racism systemic change in coordination and collaboration with stakeholders from various sectors. We firmly believe our public systems must be truly equitable and meaningfully inclusive so that all Canadians are afforded equal opportunities and experience true belonging and respect. We encourage those who are interested in learning more about the ongoing activities to join the Network.