



June 9, 2022

Hon. Mark Holland, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons
Mr. John Brassard, House leader of the official opposition
Mr. Alain Therrien, House leader of the Bloc Québécois
Mr. Peter Julien, House leader of the New Democratic Party

Dear House leaders,

Re. Bill C-226, An Act Respecting the Development of a National Strategy to Assess, Prevent and Address Environmental Racism and To Advance Environmental Justice

The undersigned civil society organizations – advocates for social justice and equity, environmental protection, and public health – urge you to co-operate to expedite passage of Bill C-226, Canada's first environmental racism law, as soon as possible.

This bill already received support at second reading in the last parliament and has subsequently been studied at committee. It's time to pass the bill and begin the long-overdue work to develop and implement a national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice.

The United States' program on environmental justice was established with an executive order nearly three decades ago, in 1994. The US EPA defines environmental justice as, "*the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys:*

- *The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and*
- *Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.*"¹

Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate impacts on Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities from polluting industries and other environmental hazards, and uneven access to nature and environmental benefits.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

The legacy of environmental racism in Canada is well-documented² and can no longer be ignored. As the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics observed in a 2020 report to the Human Rights Council, “There exists a pattern in Canada where marginalized groups, and Indigenous peoples in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada.”³

Canada urgently needs a national strategy and accountability mechanisms to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and advance environmental justice, as proposed by bill C-226.

Bill C-226, introduced by MP Elizabeth May (Saanich – Gulf Islands), incorporates amendments passed by committee in the last parliament; it is identical to the bill approved one year ago by three of the four parties represented on ENVI, and moved by the fifth party in the House. We are encouraged that multiple parties – and the Prime Minister – have again confirmed their support for Bill C-226 and look forward to it becoming law.

Please do not let another year go by before passing Canada’s first environmental racism law. We ask you to collaborate to ensure the House can send Bill C-226 to the Senate as soon as possible and before the summer recess.

Avoiding further delay will allow the important work of examining the link between racialization, socio-economic status and environmental risk, and developing a national strategy on environmental racism and environmental justice to begin.

Sincerely,

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Elaine MacDonald
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Raissa Marks
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² See for example: <https://www.enrichproject.org/>

³ http://www.srtoxics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Canada-HRC-45_AUV.pdf

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*C.c. Hon. Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Mr. Kyle Seeback, CPC Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Mme Monique Pauzé, BQ Environment Critic
Ms. Laurel Collins, NDP Environment Critic
Ms. Elizabeth May, GPC Parliamentary Leader*