



environmental  
defence

Submission to  
House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment  
and Sustainable Development

*Study: Bill C-230, An Act respecting the development of  
a national strategy to redress environmental racism*

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Prepared by:

Julia Levin  
Climate & Energy Program Manager

**About Environmental Defence Canada**

Environmental Defence Canada is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization that works with government, industry and individuals to defend clean water, a safe climate and healthy communities.

Environmental Defence Canada is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization, representing a community of 260,000 supporters across Canada, working to defend clean water, a safe climate and healthy communities. As environmental and public health advocates who work to address the climate and ecology crises, we know that there is no environmental justice without racial justice. We recognize Canada's long history of systemic oppression of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) and call for changes to the systems that historically have and continue to enable racial injustice and systemic racism, including environmental racism.

**It is critical that the government, and all political parties in Canada, acknowledge the impact environmental racism has on racialized communities and take meaningful steps to redress these harms. This includes passing Bill C-230: *An Act Respecting the Development of a National Strategy to Redress Environmental Racism* without delay.**

In Canada and around the world, communities of colour are experiencing the worst impacts of environmental injustice. BIPOC communities disproportionately live and work in toxic environments with unacceptable exposure to harmful chemicals, due to systemic racism and Canada's inadequate and poorly enforced environmental regulations. These same communities experience disproportionate health risks caused by fossil fuel extraction, transport and processing and are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, due to systemic discrimination and barriers, BIPOC communities are unfairly excluded from political institutions and decision-making, including environmental policy decision-making.

From the decision approximately 60 years ago to offload pulp mill effluent into Pictou Landing First Nation's once-pristine Boat Harbour, to toxic landfills placed in the African Nova Scotian communities of Shelburne and Lincolnville, to mercury contamination in Grassy Narrows First Nation, to petrochemical facilities in Chemical Alley in Ontario and in British Columbia, and toxic waste at northern DEW line sites, the legacy of ongoing environmental racism in Canada can be found coast to coast to coast. Health science also shows that many Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities are exposed to greater levels of toxic chemicals from food, drinking water and consumer products such as personal care and beauty products. Racialized communities experience elevated rates of cancer, reproductive problems, respiratory issues, and other environmentally-linked health problems. Such health issues are exacerbated by the cumulative impacts of multiple toxic exposures on communities whose economic and political marginalization often concurrently worsens 'social determinants' of poor health such as poverty and substandard housing conditions. These are exposures that would not be tolerated or allowed to

persist in White or affluent communities in Canada. This harm is the result of systemic racism and policy failure, which is incumbent upon elected officials to rectify.

Bill C-230 would give a legislative mandate for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to develop a national strategy on environmental racism, and require the Minister to regularly:

- Examine the links between race, socio-economic status and environmental risk.
- Collect information and statistics relating to the location of environmental hazards and negative health outcomes in affected communities.
- Assess the administration and enforcement of environmental laws and how federal laws and policies could be improved to better involve, compensate and protect affected communities.

This bill would compel the government to generate the information needed and take measures to remedy and protect communities that have been disproportionately affected by pollution. This bill is expected to be voted on by members of parliament this spring. Developing a national strategy is a long overdue step in acknowledging the problem and beginning to redress environmental racism.

Bill C-230 aligns with the government's commitment to tackling systemic racism and the proposal to recognize the right to a healthy environment in the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA) in Bill C-28. While the right to a healthy environment is recognized in Bill C-28, Bill C-230 remains essential to address environmental racism. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to environmental policies will not adequately benefit communities who are disproportionately exposed, and experiencing political and economic marginalization. We need to be intentional about environmental racism and the health harms for many peoples living in Canada.

Bill C-230 would help align Canada's actions with some of the environmental justice executive actions signed by the U.S. President Biden in the early days of his administration.

Passing Bill C-230 would make history as Canada's first bill to redress environmental racism. Making this bill law would be a tangible first step on the path to reconciling the harms communities have experienced from toxic pollution and environmental hazards. This is an opportunity for all parties to lead and take meaningful action on environmental justice.

**Environmental Defence urges the members of the committee to pass Bill C-230 without delay.**