

ONE PEOPLE, ONE COMMUNITY, ONE VOICE



5TH

# YOUTH RESILIENCY

CONFERENCE: EMPOWERING  
YOUTH IN CIVIC SPACES



# Contents

- 03... Acknowledgements
- 04... Welcome Remarks
- 05... Greetings from Dignitaries
- 07... Executive Summary
- 09... Keynote Address 1
- 14... **Panel Discussion I:** Socio-cultural pressures on youth identity and intersectionality of culture and Faith
- 21... **Panel Discussion II:** Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma
- 31... Youth Presentations
- 35... Keynote Address 2
- 37... **Panel Discussions III:** Barriers to Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth
- 45... **Panel IV:** Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media
- 49... Recommendations
- 54... Appendix A: Conference Overview
- 56... Appendix B: Agenda
- 58... Appendix C: Speaker Profile
- 66... Appendix D: About Midaynta

# Acknowledgment

## Land Acknowledgment

On behalf of Midaynta Community Services, we acknowledge that for thousands of years, the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat peoples and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island including a diverse population of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We would also like to acknowledge those of us who came here involuntary, particularly as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, and so we honor and give tribute to ancestors of Africa origin and descent. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and live on this land, and we express our appreciation to all Indigenous peoples who have come before us, and all those who are leading us into a brighter future.

## Acknowledgment

The following youth were instrumental in organizing the fourth annual conference: **Muna Ali, Ayann Abdiker, Maryam Jumale, Yasmin Yusuf, Hajjra Abdulle, Hibaq Warsame, Aliyah Yusuf, Amiira Yusuf, Shamsa Mohamed, and Zahra Hassan.** Without their dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm this conference would not have been possible. We would also like to thank all the staff and board of directors of Midaynta Community Services, the staff of Somali Immigrant Aid organization, participants, and volunteers for their commitment, resilience, and enthusiasm for the conference. We would also like to acknowledge all panelists who were generous enough to share their time with us. Without your

participation, this conference would not have been possible. We appreciate the time you took to share your expertise, knowledge, and wisdom. Special thanks to all our moderators who will do a great job chairing the panels and posing questions for the panelists.

Midaynta Community Services would like to acknowledge our monthly roundtable partners, who for many years have supported Midaynta Community Services, participated at our round table meetings, and provided us with great insight and expertise. Special thanks to our key partners who participated and supported the conference in various ways: The Ontario Ministry of Children Community and Social Services (MCCSS), United States Consulate General in Toronto; The Ministry of Education; Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE); The Diversity Institute at Ryerson University; The Mosaic Institute; The Black Experience Project; Color of Poverty- Color of Change; The Canadian Council of Imams; Somali Immigrant Aid Organization; RCMP, York Regional Police, Toronto Police Service; and Peel Police.

Special thanks to the following for supporting us in making this conference a reality: **Dr. Ghayda Hassan, UNISCO, UN Security Council, US Consulate, Dr. Lorraine Otoide, Dr. Carly (Caroline) Manion, Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, Stella Musembi and Dr. Thy Phu.**

**This report was prepared by Muna Ali, Ifat Razzaque, Emily Dobrich, and designed by Hajjra Abdulle. Inquiries and comments regarding this report should be directed to [info@midaynta.com](mailto:info@midaynta.com)**

# Welcome Remarks



It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 5th Annual Youth Resilience Conference, hosted here at the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto. We are honoured to have each one of you join us for this momentous occasion.

The purpose of this year's conference is to build civil society's capacity to respond to violent extremism and breakdown barriers to accessing civic spaces for youth. We will embark on a crucial mission to strengthen the bonds between young minds worldwide, forging connections that transcend borders and foster resilience education. We aspire to create safe spaces that encourage open dialogue and empower young voices through resilience education, equipping them with the tools to combat violent extremist narratives both on the Internet and social media.

Together, we will explore the essential themes of education, identity crisis, mental health, sense of belonging, and family connection. Each of these themes carries immense significance in shaping the lives of young individuals, and through this conference, we aim to explore innovative approaches and tangible solutions that will have a lasting impact on youth radicalization.

Throughout the years, this conference has been a beacon of hope, fueled by collaboration, empathy, and a shared commitment to positive change. Our esteemed panelists and speakers are here today to share their invaluable insights and experiences that will shed light on the challenges we face and provide us with the tools to forge lasting solutions.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors, IOM, UTSC, and SIAO, for their unwavering support in making this conference a reality. Additionally, we acknowledge the dedication and efforts of our Board of Directors, Roundtable members, staff, and volunteers, whose passion drives this important endeavour forward.

To our esteemed panelists and speakers, we are honoured to have you with us. Your willingness to share your knowledge and expertise is instrumental in our ongoing efforts to combat youth radicalization and promote a safer and more resilient community.

Let us come together in the spirit of unity, understanding, and resilience, as we strive to achieve our objectives and make a meaningful impact on the lives of young people worldwide. Thank you all for being a part of this incredible journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mahad Yusuf'.

Sincerely,

Mahad Yusuf, Executive Director  
Midaynta Community Services



Ontario

# 2023 Youth Resiliency Conference

## Greeting from Premier Doug Ford

Hi everyone,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the Annual Youth Resiliency Conference.

This is a great opportunity to come together and discuss issues faced by black youth.

We will always stand with our many cultural and racialized communities to stop hate and discrimination in Ontario.

Thank you to everyone involved for taking initiative to address challenges like racism and hate and for sharing knowledge and building community engagement.

I hope you have a very successful conference and wishing you all the very best and God Bless.



# Toronto Police Service

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(416) 808-2222 FAX (416) 808-8202  
Website: www.TorontoPolice.on.ca



Myron Demkiw  
Chief of Police

File Number: .....

## Message from the Chief of Police



On behalf of the Toronto Police Service, I extend greetings to everyone attending the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Resiliency Conference.

This annual initiative, designed to address issues impacting Black Youth, provides an important platform for these invaluable discussions. This conference not only facilitates the exchange of information but also fosters an environment conducive to learning, sharing and collaboration amongst participants and panelists.

Participants – you represent the future of Toronto. You will help shape our communities and find solutions to some of our most significant challenges. The insights and knowledge you gain from this conference will undoubtedly serve as a compass, helping to guide you through your own challenges, by promoting resilience and equipping you with additional skills and resources.

I commend Midyanta Community Services for their efforts in organizing this great conference year after year in contributing to the foundation of a stronger community and city.

Sincerely,

Myron Demkiw, M.O.M.  
Chief of Police

*To Serve and Protect - Working with the Community*

# Executive Summary

The Midaynta Youth Resiliency Conference Report outlines the keynote addresses and panel discussions from a multi-day event that brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including community leaders, youth advocates, researchers, and policy makers, to address critical issues facing youth. This report highlights the key discussions, insights, findings, and recommendations from the conference, focusing on enhancing youth resilience through community engagement, cultural affirmation, and addressing socio-cultural and mental health challenges.

## Keynote Addresses

Dr. Ghayda Hassan discussed the concept of "disruptive convergence," emphasizing how internet and social media influence can exacerbate societal divisions and affect youth mental health. She highlighted the need for a holistic understanding of violence and emphasized the importance of critical media literacy to combat polarization.

Imam Horsed Noah emphasized youth resilience through understanding identity crises and the impact of societal pressures, advocating for community engagement, spiritual strength, and knowledge to counter challenges like bullying and identity confusion. He stressed the importance of fostering a supportive environment to empower youth to withstand negative influences and contribute positively to society.

## Panel Discussions

### Panel 1: Socio-cultural Pressures on Youth Identity and Intersectionality of Culture and Faith

- Panelists, including Shaikh Habeeb Alli, Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, and Imam Horsed Noah, discussed how various social and cultural pressures shape youth identity. They emphasized the importance of community support and faith in fostering a strong sense of self.

### Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma

- Speakers like Ms. Bibi Ramdyal and Ms. Marwa Ahmed highlighted the impacts of intergenerational trauma and the importance of balancing traumatic memories with positive ones. They advocated for culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches and the importance of community and faith-based support systems.

### Panel 3: Barriers to Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth

- The discussion focused on the need for greater youth representation in civic spaces. Panelists stressed the importance of addressing social, financial, and displacement
- Barriers to ensure inclusivity and active participation of marginalized youth in community dialogues.

## Recommendations

- **Promote Inclusive Civic Spaces:** Implement policies that mandate youth representation in civic dialogues and create safe spaces that encourage active participation.
- **Support Cultural and Faith-based Strengths:** Encourage the use of cultural expressions like poetry and storytelling to address trauma and reinforce community ties.
- **Enhance Media Literacy:** Educate youth on critical media consumption to combat the effects of social media-induced polarization and confirmation bias.
- **Address Intergenerational Trauma:** Provide culturally relevant mental health services and promote open discussions about trauma and its impacts across generations.
- **Foster Resilience through Community Engagement:** Encourage youth participation in community activities to build social networks and develop a strong sense of identity and belonging.

## Conclusion

The conference highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to supporting Somali-Canadian youth by addressing their socio-cultural and mental health challenges. Promoting inclusivity, cultural affirmation, and resilience-building strategies can create an empowering environment for these young individuals.

This executive summary captures the essential themes and actionable insights from the Midaynta Youth Resiliency Conference, offering a framework for future initiatives to enhance the well-being and resilience of Somali-Canadian Youth.



# Keynote Address 1: Disruptive convergence the internet, trauma and violence

DAY 1



## DR. GHAYDA HASSAN

Dr. Ghayda Hassan is a clinical psychologist and professor of clinical psychology at UQAM university in Montreal and has several research, clinical and community based national and international affiliations. She is the director of the Canadian Practitioner Network for the Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (RPC-PREV; funded by PS Canada; <https://cpnprev.ca>). She is also a UNESCO co-chair in Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (UNESCO-PREV; <http://chaireunesco-prev.ca/fr/acceuil/>). She currently sits as the Chair of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) or the GIFCT (Global Internet Forum for

Countering Terrorism; <https://gifct.org>). She is a researchers and senior clinical consultant at the SHERPA-RAPS (SHERPA subteam RAPS for Research and Action on Radicalisation and Social Suffering ; ([http://www.sherpa\\_recherche.com/fr/recherche-pratiques/souffrancesocialeetradicalisation/](http://www.sherpa_recherche.com/fr/recherche-pratiques/souffrancesocialeetradicalisation/)) at the CIUSSS Center-West of the island of Montreal. She is a member of national and international committees such as: the RCMP management advisory board, the Independent Advisory Board of the GIFCT, and a member of the expert advisory group on revised legislative and regulatory framework for harmful content online.

Her systematic reviews, research and clinical activities are **centred around 4 main areas** of clinical cultural psychology:

- Social suffering, intercommunity relations, radicalization and extremist violence
- Intervention in family violence & cultural diversity
- Identity, belonging and mental health of children and adolescents from ethnic/religious minorities
- Working with vulnerable immigrants and refugees

The focus of this keynote was to understand disruptive convergence and how the internet affects brain neurology and impacts our decisions in life. Dr. Hassan shared how the world is becoming more characterized by social polarization which drives out the social space and creates distances between communities characterized by identities in opposition, separation, progressive division, and tensions about differences that are made to appear irreconcilable. The government uses this kind of divisive discourse to create categories which cause social division within communities based on religion, status, race and hierarchy. Identity based politics create divisions and competitions rather than solidarity among different communities and groups. The social spaces built on these discourses and identity politics feed conflict and violence.

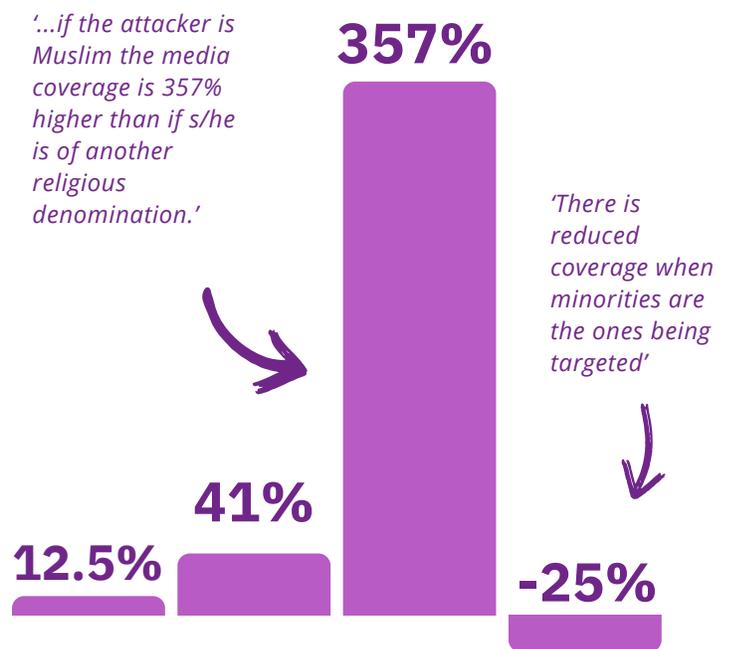
**Why do media/social media play a role in social disruption, polarization, and division? Who makes the news? Who controls the content? Who frames the prioritization of the day’s news?**

Dr. Hassan emphasized that words are powerful. She said they are the way we understand our reality. We cannot be indifferent to the words and messages that are sent to us through the media or the words we use on social media. A key question she gave to reflect on was:

*“What is the message that is being conveyed?”*

Dr. Hassan explained how the internet is very individualized and feeds every individual different data based on their personality and social media history. This makes the internet biased based on our personal preferences. We are repetitively fed the content we have previously searched. This creates confirmation bias with an illusion that more and more people think like us. Algorithms propose increasingly targeted and polarized content, without access to other points of view.

For instance, a study on media coverage on terrorists’ attacks in the US found that if the attacker is Muslim the media coverage is 357% higher than if s/he is of another religious denomination. Muslims are responsible for 12.5% of attacks and receive over 41% media coverage. When the targets of the attack are a racialized minority or Muslim group, coverage is reduced (Kearns, Betus & Lemieux, 2017)



**Bias in the**

The infographic includes a cartoon of a person at a computer with the text: "I've heard the rhetoric from both sides... time to do my own research on the real truth". Another cartoon shows a person at a computer with the text: "Google Literally the first link that agrees with what you already believe". A third cartoon shows a person at a computer with the text: "... jackpot".

**Study on media coverage on terrorists attacks in the US:**

- If the attacker is Muslim, the media coverage is 357% higher than if he is of another religious denomination (Kearns, Betus & Lemieux, 2017)
- Muslims are responsible for 12.5% of attacks and receive over 41% media coverage.
- When the targets of the attack are a minority or Muslim group, coverage is reduced.

**National Institute of Public Health of Quebec's recommendations for coverage of mass killings:**

1. Take into account consequences of contagion and imitation.
2. Take into account consequences of feelings of insecurity and distress.
3. Take into account consequences of stigmatization.

\*View link [here](#)

AI and Deep Fake can be used by politically motivated individuals to influence our perceptions and silence the voices of the youth and youth groups, rights defenders, and activists. For individuals at risk: social media and internet become facilitators and accelerators in combination with offline factors to influence their perceptions.

For individuals less at risk: Exposure to propaganda and associated violence may not influence them to become more violent, but they can become traumatized by what they see. Exposure can increase the risk of violent radicalization and/or other forms of distress (e.g., vicarious trauma, stress, fear, aggression, pessimism, anxiety and depression). The consequences of transmission and imitation must be considered. Dr. Hassan asserted that parents and youth have a responsibility to act responsibly towards the content that is provided to them online.

### **Dystopia and violence**

Dr. Hassan emphasized that social media teaches us a dystopian discourse and violence. Dystopia is a discourse that it is the end of the world that youth cannot make it because society is so expensive etc. The future is dark, the apocalypse is appealing. It is a form of social rebellion and associated with totalitarianism and various forms of dehumanization.

It is a representation in which the ideal does not serve the common good. She cautioned that social media feeds dystopian discourse which will create more social hopelessness. This is an issue because usually the more hopeless humans are made to feel, the less likely they are to act in solidarity with one another. Dr. Hassan reported that dystopian discourse is more promoted and weaponized by extremist groups.

### **She described how extremist groups offer youth a vision of the world that includes:**

- Provision of simple, coherent, explanation aimed at giving meaning to life and solutions
- Explanation of suffering and what to do to stop suffering
- Propounding that youth are victims of one or more groups that wish them harm
- Legitimization of fantasies of revenge by dehumanizing the other
- Provision of a virtual or real community of belonging
- Provoking others to react (e.g., parents, school, authorities)
- Offering immediate rewards to youth

Dr. Hassan suggested that some youths are attracted to dystopian discourses because they want to: escape a reality that is difficult, search for identity and meaning or feel happy, excited or important. She added that extremists are very good at tailoring the message to what the individual wants. Dr. Hassan pointed out that today we are seeing intersections of different forms violence. For example, gang violence intersecting with extremist violence. She proposed that society needs to consider violence as a holistic societal problem. Dr. Hassan introduced the key concept of disruptive (disturbing) convergence which is a phenomenon that happens when different fields emerge individually then suddenly converge to create something new. She said this type of convergence creates a disruption of the economic state. When applied to violence it has negative consequences. She noted that violence divides into different fields such as identity politics, globalization, inequalities and perceived grievances.

These may lead to, conspiracy theories, dystopia distress, the acquiring of weapons and normalization of violence. All these different sets of events converge through the internet, social media, virtual-reality, artificial intelligence and the deep fake. These phenomena have the potential to lead to an increase in societal violence. Globalization and these processes have produced perceived grievances, exposure to and normalization of violence with little regulation. Dr. Hassan warned that the growing reliance on digital systems for interaction, together with the presence of polarised political and social discourses and the proliferation of misinformation, gradually decelerate human's abilities to think critically. These factors also reduce the online and offline spaces for constructive debate.

*"This gradual impairment of human cognition erodes three pillars of democracy: a well-informed population, resilience to foreign influence, and the capacity for effective public debates" (Miller 2020)*

Dr. Hassan urged that to address disruptive convergence requires building constructive convergence as a prevention strategy. She recommended that we need to look for prevention at all levels and in all spaces. Dr. Hassan presented the second key concept of constructive convergence which means going back to the basic principles of solidarity and using the spaces and technologies we have to produce something more positive.

### How do we build constructive convergence?

- We need to have a vision for education, prevention, protection and public institutions.
- Decentering/decolonizing ourselves
- Encouraging collaboration/complexity
- Fostering anti-oppressive/anti-racist approaches
- Enhance critical thinking/openness to multiple perspectives
- Promoting cultural humility/safety

Dr. Hassan encouraged that attention be paid to a public health approach. She suggested that a public health approach promotes and protects the health of people and the communities where they live, learn, work and play and helps the community using health solutions. She proffered that the health of a population encompasses physical and mental health, as well as general safety and well-being. Dr. Hassan further pointed out that health is influenced by social characteristics and relationships, beyond individual determinants and behaviours. A public health model is interdisciplinary, aims to implement preventative measures to preserve the health of the population, and seeks to reduce harm. Dr. Hassan also discussed how trauma informed approaches are needed in order to change the paradigm from "What's wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?" She said this encourages responding in a more culturally adaptive way to address what has happened.

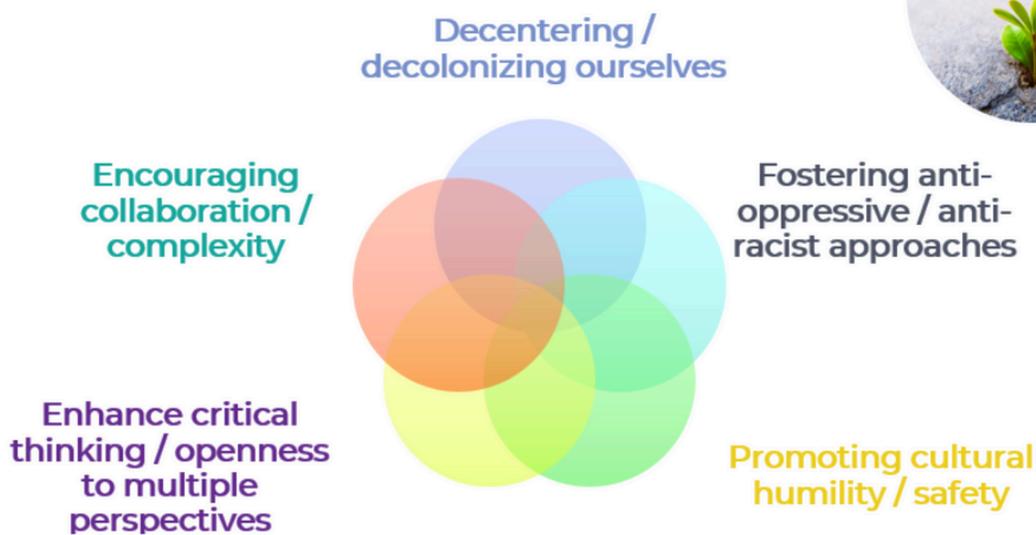
Dr. Hassan's final recommendations were to that communities be created with the following attributes: safety, trustworthiness, transparency, peer support, collaboration, mutuality, empowerment, voice, choice, cultural historical and gender issues. Dr. Hassan reiterated that behind every behavior there is an emotion and behind every emotion there is a need. She concluded by saying that if we focus on the need, we may have a better understanding of the behavior.



**KEY POINTS:**

- **Be mindful of our use of internet platforms. Use internet platforms and search engines that do not track your search habits and history. Develop the skills and knowledge to be critically reflective of what is being fed to you by the media.**
- **Put pressure on the media companies for prevention and regulation on how the internet is used.**
- **Emerging intersecting forms of violence require that violence in society today must be understood holistically.**
- **Disruptive convergence occurs when the internet, social media AI and deep fake bring together different forms of violence which is a threat to peace and democracy.**
- **Constructive convergence is a prevention strategy to deter disruptive convergence and can help in the recognition that more challenges could be addressed together than separately.**

## Constructive convergence



# Panel 1: Socio-cultural pressures on youth identity and intersectionality of culture & Faith

DAY 1



## Panelists

This panel explored how community plays a role in shaping identity and discussed various influences that impact identity formation of young people such as family, peers, and media. The impact of community and environment on youth identity was also discussed.

- **Shaikh Habeeb Alli**, Executive Director for One Love Family Services, Muslim Chaplain, Author
- **Dr. Hamdi Mohamed**, Organizational Transformation Consultant, Social Historian, and Researcher
- **Imam Hersed Noah**, Outreach Director of SICO, Faith in Public Life, Muslim Relief Organization

**Panel Moderator: Yasmin Yusuf**, Student and Family Advocate at Midaynta Community Services.



## Shaikh Habeeb Alli

Originates from Guyana where he studied at Queen's College and then traveled to India where he graduated with a Masters in Islamic Theology and Arabic Language from Deoband Darul Uloom, and also a Diploma in Journalism. Shaikh Habeeb has authored twenty-six publications on Islam and poetry including Chaplaincy. He is a member of the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians and the Canadian Council of Imams. Shaikh Habeeb Alli presently serves as Executive Director for One Love Family Services and Muslim Chaplain with Correctional Services in Ontario Federal Institutions and Multi Faith Chaplain with Toronto Long Term Care. He has been active in promoting Islamic Chaplaincy with the One Love Gala and the One Love Podcast.

## Summary

### Question: How do you see socio-cultural pressures on youth identity and intersectionality of culture and faith?

Shaikh Habeeb Alli began with an anecdote on how the clash between culture and faith can lead to an identity crisis. He has seen many Somali youths incarcerated. The example he gave was a young man who came to Canada as a child after the war in his home country, adjusting to Canadian landscape, who felt ostracized being left out of the Canadian mosaic and could not find a sense of belonging in Canada. The islamophobia in schools and society reinforced his separation from Canadian society. This led towards extremism, denial and the disclaiming of his identity. This person went to prison but when he came out, he taught himself more about Islam, went back to Somalia and lives there happily now. Shaikh Habeeb Alli claimed that stories reaffirm that not all is lost. Youth can feel disavowed and disconnected from the community, however that does not mean that that all is lost – youth can still leave the trajectory of self-harm. Shaikh Habeeb Alli said our identities are multiple, that is the intersectionality of it.

Identity is multifaceted, that we are not just Somali or Guyanese or Muslim or male or female. We are multiple identities that connect. He declared that the intersectionality of those identities play out on different scales and different scopes at different times.

### Question: Sometimes with intersectionality faith gets pushed to the side, how can you advise the young people to explore their faith on culture especially as it comes to their intersectionality?

Shaikh Habeeb Alli responded that children are labeled in school because teachers might not understand the trauma they come with from different war zones and backgrounds. Faith has been presented as a non-engaging activity. He said that the foundation is important and that there is a need to nurture that foundational learning. Shaikh Habeeb Ali also believes that whatever love for faith that was placed into your heart and life at an early stage can be re-ignited and lead your back. Shaikh Habeeb Alli said we need to have different supports in the educational system so that young people can understand their intersectionality and that it is our responsibility as adults to ensure they have a safe space for that.





## Dr. Hamdi Mohamed

Dr. Hamdi Mohamed is a social historian, researcher, and organizational transformation consultant. She is the Founder and Principal of Kaafi Consulting. She has over 20 years of experience leading organizations, consulting, teaching, and designing and implementing applied research projects in Canada and internationally. A deep commitment to transformative change, liberation, and communal healing guides Dr. Mohamed's life, work, and research. Serving in non-profit sector leadership for decades, including being the former Executive Director of the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) and the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC), she initiated and designed ground-breaking and socially innovative youth programs. She lectured widely on refugee resettlement, human rights, anti-racism, public policy, and gender and politics in North America, Europe and Africa. She published several research papers and contributed to numerous scholarly works, including books, international conferences, and seminars. Her academic research focuses on African diasporic experiences, community building, social reconciliation, and Afro-Islamic indigenous healing practices. Dr. Mohamed has received several leadership awards for her community service and professional achievements. Some awards include being named a Community Builder by Black History Ottawa and being one of the Ottawa Citizen's Top 10 People to Watch in Ottawa in 2010. She holds a PhD and MA in History from the University of Ottawa and a BA in African History and English Literature from the Somali National University.

## Our Sense of the World: Context and Experiences of Somali Canadian Youth

### Introduction and context

Dr. Mohamed opened her talk with a Sherene Razack quote:

**“Experience of the world is not admitted into the dominant knowledge paradigm.”**

This quote holds significance because if we don't find ways to resist the dominant knowledge paradigms, our histories will be erased, inaccurate narratives will inform our work, and solutions to complex challenges will not come to us. She then discussed how contextual, including painful, traumatic journeys, a distinct racial disadvantage, legacies of restrictive immigration laws, and hostile societal attitudes, have contributed to creating unique challenges for the Somali community. She mentioned that it is crucial to understand that the impact of the immigration laws that have put Somalis in limbo is being experienced decades later. The legacies of these laws continue to affect a generation later. She advised that it is vital to name and document the challenges and how they continue to impact us.

While some of these challenges are documented and known, what is not commonly known is the specific impacts of intersections of migration-related stressors, anti-Black racism and anti-Muslim bigotry and how these manifest in our everyday life experiences a generation later.

Somalis' agency and how they resisted multiple complex problems is little known. Being grounded in faith and teachings from ancient and rich history and culture equipped many to cope with ongoing challenges.

### Culture matters

Dr. Mohamed shared that she now invests her time and energy in studying and exploring ways of reclaiming this history and knowledge to create solutions. She explained the importance of poetry and how many use this creative and artistic self-expression to communicate and share their pain and suffering, for example. She mentions that she now uses a lot of poetry in her work and her public lectures.

She shared a few examples of poetry, including a poem by Hawa Jibril, a well-known and respected poet speaking to the effects of the long delays in getting the necessary immigration for adequate settlement and contribution...

***“I am trapped, for I am not yet ‘landed’  
I miss my cause and the country of my songs.  
Deprivation of my beautiful Africa.  
I must be content with the fate God had in  
store for me” - Hawa Jibril***

Dr. Mohamed went on to explain that culture matters in many ways. Culture shapes how we view the world, make sense of shattering experiences, and express individual and communal concerns. Culture is always at play. Therefore, it is important to name the culture shaping our worldview, how we interact with each other, and how we make decisions. This naming makes the power dynamics in policymaking and program design in our communities more explicit and helps us address societal power imbalances. Dr. Mohamed suggested that part of the culture that Somalis continue to maintain is the social obligations towards their neighbours, who are respected. These cultures of mutual support and care are observed daily even though the structures (extended family and kinship network) that maintained them have mostly collapsed. She said this communal attitude and strong faith have helped many live through complex traumas of dislocation and social losses and overcome migration challenges.

She advised us to name, claim, and reclaim culture and religion. She acknowledged that because the infrastructure for sustaining culture is no longer available, it can be difficult for young people to see or access these communal practices in this context. Nevertheless, they may be liberating in many ways once they access them.

In addition, young people are constantly exposed to cultural messages that are stereotypical, biased, and harmful everywhere, including within institutions that sometimes socialize youth to hate who they are and in public through narratives in the media and other social spaces.

### **On discontinuity, hate and hurts**

Dr. Mohamed said that racism continues to persist, and the hurts and the hate continue in many forms today as in the past. These hate and hurts take different shapes. They result in “Othering” and social, economic, and political exclusions, causing painful experiences, psychological distress, and much suffering. She said what we see now is that experiences of becoming refugees and being Black and Muslim create situations of intersecting oppression and discrimination. Inequitable societal structures continue to shape the second generation significantly.

So, there are still challenges, even if there have been many beautiful efforts to rebuild the community and institutions, such as places of worship and established businesses.

She emphasized how poetry and other creative arts could be used to resist oppression and fight for human rights. Unnamed and unaddressed traumas from these experiences continue to impact our community.

Also, weakening traditional knowledge and cultural wisdom that promotes healthy identity development, psychological reconstruction, and healing sometimes limits our ability to find creative and sustainable solutions to complex challenges. She reflected that second-generation Somalis may only sometimes have access to the necessary and multiple levels of community support for their professional, spiritual, and personal development. This needs our collective thinking and action.

### Navigating identities in multiple social and cultural spaces

There are many challenges, but much to celebrate and hope for. Dr. Mohamed said that young Somalis occupy simultaneous and multiple identities. They often employ these intersecting identities creatively to recreate culture and kinship in this context. There are many manifestations of youth using their Muslim, Somali, and Black consciousness, giving spirits, and a legacy of community building to stand up for justice. They are also building alliances across these identities to courageously challenge systemic oppressions in Canada and worldwide and struggle for human rights. We see positive effects emerging in this context. Dr. Mohamed used the tree analogy to explain how the conditions in which we grow are essential. In a good environment, a tree grows strong and well. She said the issues we see relate to the imperative of finding the right conditions for individual and collective growth when we first arrived as refugees seeking safety and security. Still, Dr. Mohamed observed that many young people are succeeding in reconstructing new identities amid multiple setbacks. She emphasized how poetry and other creative arts could be used to resist oppression and fight for human rights.

### Constructing a new narrative

Dr. Mohamed discussed how people express their experiences in their own ways. For example, some people transform their sorrow, pain, and grief into beautiful art that the world appreciates. They use their individual and collective pain and tribulations to raise awareness and create better worlds. An example is the work of K'naan, A Canadian-Somali Rapper who used art to express his experiences in his songs. Dr. Mohamed shared another example. Ifrah Mansour is a poet who uses her experiences to express concerns about social injustices and shares how she finds strength and security in her culture and faith. Here is one of her poems:

*My survival is a testimony to humanity's depth and compassion.  
My traumas can teach the greatest lessons on humanity...  
My culture is a blanket from the elements of bigotry.  
My religion is my pillow for my compassion.  
My history is a lullaby for tales not to be repeated.*

### Conclusion

Dr. Mohamed shared a Somali proverb in her final note:

***'Maxaad qabtaa waxba kaama qaaddee qalbigey u roon tahay'***

This proverb generally conveys that people care about you, inquire about you and your family, and pray for you. It captures our cultural values of community, interdependence, and service. Our lives are organized around these values. The values continue to be operationalized in many ways in this context, and we see positive changes emerge.



## Imam Horsed Noah

Outreach director of SICO, an umbrella of 7 Islamic centers in Columbus Ohio. Imam Horsed is a board member of faith in public life which is a national platform where faith leaders address social issues that affect us all. Studied under host of Muslim scholars in the traditional learning of Islamic studies, Imam Horsed Noah also travels extensively and lectures on issues like spirituality, social justice and youth empowerment. Imam Horsed Noah has degrees in Biochemistry and microbiology and is currently working on his masters in theology and sociology. Imam Horsed is part of Muslim relief organization that regularly travels to the Horn of Africa and help internally displaced people in the area.

**Question: In terms of your experience and knowledge working with young people and having deep conversations, can you highlight, in terms of intersectionality, what youth feel about faith and youth resilience?**

Imam Horsed Noah looked at this question through the lens of two guiding scriptures, the Holy book and the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH). He said people from the cave were youth with resilience. They were firm in their principles. His definition of resilience is to have the ability to withstand something to stand against what Professor Hassan has termed “affective” or “shaitanic” traps”.

Evil acts are beautified by shaitan such as radicalization, addiction, and so forth. Imam Horsed Noah wanted to address and recognize the root cause as an identity crisis youth faces – i.e. what is your identity, Canadian, say Wallahi, etc. He said the most difficult question today is identity. Who are you? Imam Horsed Noah discussed how our identity is defined not only on an individual level but also by the social groups we belong to. He considered how this relates to intersectionality which is a way of looking at the complex social system and examining the intersecting trends and points. He added that all these things have an impact on our lives and how we view the world.

Imam Horsed Noah shared that the average youth spends 9 hrs a day on social media (i.e. phones). He said they see many advertisements throughout the day. He mentioned that on average, every person today sees between 4-10 thousand advertisements every day.

He cautioned that some of the slogans from these advertisements affect our identity. He warned that many people become very confused because of this identity crisis. He cautioned that if you do not know who you are, you cannot interact with the world. He added that if you cannot interact with the world, you cannot contribute positively to the community you live in and society.

You need to define yourself to be well accepted in this society. Imam Horsed Noah spoke about the issues of bullying. He reported that according to Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), 1 in 4 Muslim students are bullied by teachers or classmates (CAIR, 2019). He said bullying can have long term negative impacts on youth. For example: An Afghani youth committed suicide due to the bullying. This is the kind of impact of identity crisis and bullying can have on youth.

**What is the solution?**

Imam Horsed Noah advised that *communities need to be proactive. Be part of your community and engage with the society in which you live.*

He encouraged that help be given to the people who are weaker, poorer and engage with the neighbors to build connection and good relationships with each other.

**Key Points**

**Be Part of Your Community**

**Seek Knowledge**

**Maintain Spirituality**



**References:**

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## Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma

DAY 1

The topic of this panel was mental health and healing intergenerational trauma, which is not discussed often, especially in the Somali community. The panelists were:

- **Bibi Ramdya**, MSW, RSW
- **Marwa Ahmed**, Curriculum and Training Specialist - CMHA Toronto
- **Hibaq Warsame**, Youth for Change Coordinator - Midaynta Community Services

**Panel Moderator:** Shamsa Mohamed, Social Media Coordinator - Midaynta Community Services



### Bibi Ramdya

Ms. Bibi Ramdya is an anti-racist Social Worker/counsellor in Toronto, Canada. She is trained as a clinical social worker and provides mental health services via her private practice to adults and youths. Ms. Ramdya also works as an independent consultant for the Toronto Child Welfare system where her current focus is to improve the experiences of service users. Ms. Ramdya received training in Anti-Racist Psychotherapy from David Archer, an anti-racist psychotherapist whose focus is Confronting Systemic Racism and Healing Racial Trauma via therapy. Ms. Ramdya has also worked as a Social Service worker for the City of Toronto for over 30 years delivering services such as Community Development to several areas in

Toronto. Ms. Ramdya has worked extensively with youths on programs such as training, employment counselling; criminal record suspension and pardons, housing, small business pitch it teams (self-employment) and financial literacy. Ms. Ramdya is an ally of 2XLGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and oppressed racial groups around the world.

### Summary

Ms. Ramdya spoke about her story and how intergenerational trauma has affected her. Ms. Ramdya is from Guyana, her father was of mixed heritage, from enslaved Africans and indentured Indians and her mother was descended from an indentured laborer. She said she grew up in a mixed and very colonized country. As a result, she heard stories about enslaved Africans and oppression and from her mother's side of indentured labourers.

Ms. Ramdya said she was fortunate to know her grandmother who came from India as an indentured labourer. Ms. Ramdya's grandmother told her about the voyage from India to Guyana, and how her sister was thrown overboard for being sick.

Ms. Ramdya's grandmother shared this story with Ms. Ramdya's mother and Ms. Ramdya, and that is how this trauma was passed down to them. Ms. Ramdya's grandmother also shared happy stories of her childhood and living in Guyana and was able to change the narrative by not only focusing on the oppression. Ms. Ramdya recalls how hearing the happy stories was very healing for her and her family.

Ms. Ramdya distinguished simple trauma as one traumatic event, from complex trauma which is when there are two or more traumatic events, different trauma and new trauma, that combine, and complex trauma. She went on to define intergenerational trauma as trauma that can be passed down from generation to generation.

She said studies have shown that this trauma can go on for up to six generations. There is evidence that if it is addressed there is a chance to change the trajectory to make its effects less potent on future generations. Ms. Ramdyal gave examples of intergenerational trauma including enslavement, holocaust, genocide, war and even refugee camps, as traumas that live forever with those who experience them and their children and grandchildren. She said that if this is not attended to, and a person lives with one trauma, having additional trauma in their life can result in symptoms such as emotional numbness and unresolved grief.

Another symptom Ms. Ramdyal discussed was hypervigilance which is the elevated state of fear and constant assessment of potential threats or threatening situations.

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She proposed that as a result of hypervigilance people can become angry and irritable. This impacts the youth of today because parents are not having their trauma addressed, and the children do not understand what is happening. This results in children feeling rejected and misunderstood. Ms. Ramdyal revealed that children bring trauma from home to school, where teachers may not understand how to deal with the intergenerational trauma and the school system presents an attitude of not understanding or caring.

Ms. Ramdyal next provided some of the ways to address the issue of intergenerational trauma. She said it can help to start having conversations about traumas to make sense of what happened. She also mentioned there can be discussions of happy events that have been experienced. Memory of the happy event would add to the traumatic memory a positive moment which will reduce the stress of the moment. Ms. Ramdyal advised parents to acknowledge the trauma they experienced. She further noted that parents can let children understand why they, the parents, carry the trauma they carry and why they might feel angry or depressed.

She then advised children to listen to their parents and try to understand what their experiences are and acknowledge that their parents experience trauma. Another piece of advice Ms. Ramdyal gave was to set goals around what you want to do and how you want to live. She suggested seeking help from community or from spiritual, faith and other agencies to support healing.



Ms. Ramdyal said people who experienced trauma need help and that is where therapy is something to be considered when other individual and community strategies are not working. She strongly suggested that therapy in connection with other counselling or therapy on its own can heal. She said that there is a need for equity deserving communities to train as therapists to better understand and support their community. This would prevent community members from having to go into detail of some lived experiences (e.g. being BIPOC or religious or immigrants, etc.).

Ms. Ramdyal shared her vision to build a community to train young people to support each other in healing as one way to combat all the trauma and promote community healing. She said this is important because through therapy we come to understand our emotions and have tools to manage the emotions and situations which can change the trajectory of a person’s life. Ms. Ramdyal suggested that we have to change the way we look at therapy, not implying that someone is crazy, but as a supportive resource - like blood work when you get a physical. Ms. Ramdyal said it is important not to close down but rather to reach out and get help.

She concluded by saying that *an engaged mind is a very productive mind and there is nothing more valuable than that.*

**Key Takeaways:**

**Community**

Communities can build resistance and heal through conversations and sharing.

**Intergenerational Trauma**

The trauma that passes down from generation to generation & impacts the lives of grandparent, parents & youth.

**Therapy**

Therapy helps heal intergenerational trauma, equipping you with tools to manage emotions & situations.





**Marwa Ahmed**

The Curriculum and Training Specialist at the Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto, for the impactful Opening Doors Project. Being an immigrant with multiple intersecting identities, Marwa directly felt the effects of this on her mental well-being and the factors shaping her overall health. Motivated by this lived experience, she pursued a degree in public health and later earned a graduate degree in health policy and equity. Throughout her studies, Marwa actively engaged with the community, creating safe spaces to break mental health stigma. She also empowered people from racialized backgrounds, advocating for their rights, and worked closely with service providers to prioritize equity and inclusion through

transformative learning. Marwa’s dedication brings a fresh perspective to the conference, emphasizing the healing of intergenerational trauma and youth mental health.

**Summary**

Ms. Ahmed started by sharing a saying

*“Our family has passed down generational trauma instead of generational wealth.”*

Ms. Ahmed said that humour can sometimes be brought in to deal with trauma, as she exemplified with this statement. However, this is an issue because it can mask the root cause, and we want to deal with the root cause.

Ms. Ahmed acknowledged that new terminology was created during the pandemic. She observed that people had to sit with their emotions and come to terms with them during the pandemic. Ms. Ahmed opined that terminology can help people make sense of what they are feeling by naming their feelings. Ms. Ahmed went on to define trans-generational trauma. She explained trauma is a response to a devastating event resulting in adverse physical and emotional outcomes. Traumatic events may include abuse, discrimination, natural disasters, and war.

She said there are 3 elements to trauma:

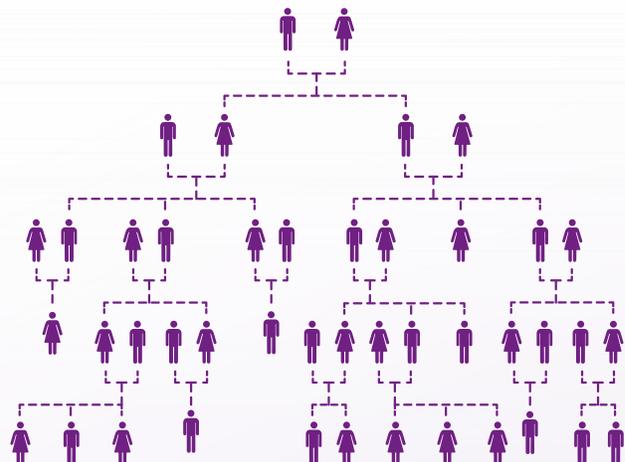
*It was unexpected*

*You were unprepared*

*You were unable to stop it from happening.*

She shared that generational trauma is a trauma that extends from one generation to the next. It begins when a group experiences a traumatic event that causes economic, cultural, and familial distress. In response, people belonging to that group develop physical and psychological symptoms.

Ms. Ahmed shared that there are several ways that trauma can be passed on. One way she said that trauma passes down generations is through epigenetic changes. The theory is that trauma changes how your genes work. Then, those changes are passed down to your children. Epigenetic changes change how your body reads your DNA, known as gene expression. Epigenetic changes may turn specific genes “on” or “off.”



People with generational trauma may have certain genes that are not expressed as usual, which increases their risk for certain illnesses like anxiety and depression. Ms. Ahmed said that because there were things undealt with, traumas are passed down through genes. Ms. Ahmed discussed how generational trauma can be passed through parenting behaviour.

She shared some examples of how trauma is transmitted include: war, extreme poverty, migration (especially forced migration), illness, single parenthood, domestic violence. She said these traumas can result in people becoming unstable, emotionally distant, or anxious. It can also lead to abuse, wounded inner child, addiction, substance use, and vices being passed down. For example, children not being taught how to choose an appropriate and emotionally healthy partner, and ending up in unhealthy situations repeating patterns. Missed learning opportunities can lead to children and youth entering the world unprepared. Ms. Ahmed said that for children these effects can then lead to attachment issues, not having a clear self-identity (third culture kid), people pleasing, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, alcoholism, low self-esteem, mistrust, irritability, lack of boundaries, survival mode, nightmares and feeling unloved.

Ms. Ahmed shared a discovery during her research on the continued integration pitfalls and violence of 2nd generation Somali Canadians: A critical discourse analysis of Bill C-86 Immigration which was an example of generational trauma in Somali Canadian youth.



Ms. Ahmed said there was much discussion about how it was the youth's fault for getting involved with gang violence, which she questioned. She felt that there was something deeper happening.

In her research she found that Somali mothers reported seeing their children experiencing sadness, depression, and other effects of trauma, even though the second generation never experienced the horrific tragedy that their parents did.

However, because of the unresolved trauma among the adults, the feelings were still there with the children. This phenomenon of transporting trauma is called trauma transference (Bokore, 2012). Ms. Ahmed shared that some of the root causes for generational trauma include limited access to resources, loss of cultural identity, historic trauma, systemic injustices, unresolved grief and loss, and cultural stigma around mental health. Ms. Ahmed emphasized that it is important to know the root causes of feelings because if there is no understanding of feelings, only the symptoms are addressed, not the cause and the feelings will never fully go away. She said that finding the root causes is necessary to find effective healing and treatment and that to find the treatment that works for you, you need to understand the root causes. She added that the goal is to break the cycle and prevent it moving forward.

Ms. Ahmed explained that once you know what the root cause is, you feel empowered because you know what the issue is, and you are taking ownership of it. She encourages a holistic approach which means looking at the bigger picture and building adaptive mechanisms and community. Ms. Ahmed said that it is important to identify the root causes to support coping and resiliency and address systemic issues.

She added that in this process we want to promote empathy and understanding. This work is also important for informing public policy and reducing stigmatization.

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Ms. Ahmed presented the anagram **RECLAIM** to outline the steps she takes when she addresses trauma. Each of the words that corresponds with each letter represents tangible steps for healing, especially healing the wounded inner child.

**R Reflection**  
It's important to reflect honestly on ones past experiences.

**E Education & Empowerment**  
Educating yourself on mental health & trauma is a big step in moving forward and in empowerment.

**C Counselling & Therapy**  
Therapy shouldn't be stigmatized. Culturally sensitive counseling options exist to meet clients where they are and honour their identities.

**L Letting Go**  
Not letting go of things that were unsuccessful in the past can impede future successes.

**A Acceptance**  
Acceptance is an important step as it allows self-love and inner healing to occur.

**I Inner Healing**  
This involves enjoying experiences missed at younger age to nurture your inner child.

**M Mindful Boundaries**  
Creating and maintaining boundaries ensures self-care, readiness to help others, and protects peace and wellbeing. Misunderstanding boundaries is common but expected.

**Mental Health Treatment**

Ms. Ahmed shared some examples of mental health treatments including:

- 1) Individual and Group Therapy
- 2) Trauma Focused Therapies
- 3) Narrative Therapy
- 4) Expressive Arts Therapy
- 5) Family Therapy
- 6) Resilience Building

Ms. Ahmed explained that resilience building involves working with a therapist to build coping skills. It involves identifying what your stressors are and what you can do to make yourself resilient. She noted that treating intergenerational trauma from a mental health perspective involves a holistic (culturally sensitive) approach that addresses the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of the trauma. She pointed out that in treating intergenerational trauma one needs to be mindful and supportive. She added that one might not be ready for a specific type of therapy and taking baby steps is a good approach. Her advice is to protect ones peace and to begin therapy slowly and incrementally. Ms. Ahmed mentioned two organizations. The first was Wanasah, a non-profit mental health agency created to address the urgent mental health needs of Black youth and their families by providing safe culturally appropriate spaces for them.

Their programs are Black centric, inclusive, holistic, and culturally safe. The second organization she mentioned was TAIBU Community Health Centre that offers Black-identifying clients from throughout the Greater Toronto Area access to primary care, health promotion and disease prevention programs in a culturally affirming environment. They offer some of the therapeutic models Ms. Ahmed mentioned in her presentation that are anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive and holistic.

**Honesty**

Honesty is very important to your healing. Protect your peace and start slowly and incrementally.

**Approach**

The best organizations and approaches are anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive and holistic. They address the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of trauma.

**Root Cause**

Ask yourself and be honest about the root causes of generational trauma





### Hibaq Warsame

Hibaq Warsame is the Coordinator for the Youth for Change Program at Midaynta Community Services, a program dedicated to substance use, addictions, mental health and supporting youth. Her work at Midaynta Community Services includes supporting marginalized communities and youth in substance use, addictions education, counseling, pre-employment development, accessing resources such as mental health support and financial aid. She also work with community partners to enhance their capacity to serve community, youth, and their families. Ms. Warsame has worked with multiple tables including the Chief’s Youth Advisory Committee where she sits with youth across the GTA to address youth concerns in the city and

work towards actionable change. She is invested in increasing civic youth engagement and making positive change, focusing on developing youth capacity by encouraging them to make healthy life choices and achieve their goals.

#### Summary

Ms. Warsame's panel discussion emphasized the increasing importance of addressing youth mental health, especially within Black communities, given today's social climate and several interconnected factors such as digital connectivity, social pressures, and global crises. She highlighted how the digital age exposes young people to unprecedented levels of information and pressure, contributing to heightened anxiety and stress. The discussion underscored the need for healthy coping mechanisms and a supportive environment for young people facing challenges related to academic performance, body image, and social acceptance.

The societal awareness of mental health issues is growing, driven by advocacy, media coverage, and public discourse. This awareness encourages conversations about mental health and intergenerational trauma, reducing stigma and creating environments where young people can seek help.

Ms. Warsame noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the drug/opioid crisis have added complexity to the mental health landscape. The pandemic disrupted familiar routines and social interactions, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression among youth. The instability created by fluctuating public health guidelines and family dynamics, such as financial strains and job losses, further exacerbated anxiety and stress. Additionally, the lack of access to resources, like teachers and mentors, intensified these challenges.

Ms. Warsame also discussed the significant impact of the drug/opioid crisis on mental health. The accessibility of substances and the normalization of drug use make it difficult for youth to resist dependency, trapping them in a cycle of self-destructive behaviors that worsen underlying psychological stress. The pandemic's isolation drove many towards substance abuse as a coping mechanism, further deepening their mental health issues.



Ms. Warsame explained that mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, forming the foundation for managing life's complexities. Emotional well-being involves understanding feelings and coping with life's challenges, while social well-being revolves around relationships and a sense of belonging. When social well-being is impacted, it affects overall mental health.

A key aspect of Ms. Warsame's talk was the concept of intergenerational trauma—the transmission of psychological and emotional wounds across generations due to significant historical or collective experiences. This trauma goes beyond genetics, encompassing unresolved emotions and coping mechanisms passed down from one generation to the next. She explained that the effects of traumatic events can last long after their occurrence, affecting the mental and emotional well-being of successive generations.

Intergenerational trauma can lead to emotional numbness or hyper-reactivity among youth, affecting their ability to connect with their emotions or causing heightened emotional sensitivity. Communities affected by intergenerational trauma often face a self-perpetuating cycle of emotional distress. The survival mechanisms learned by one generation may inadvertently reinforce the trauma in the next, hindering overall mental health and well-being.

To address intergenerational trauma, Ms. Warsame advocated for a multifaceted approach that acknowledges historical contexts and incorporates cultural sensitivity. Understanding the historical roots of trauma, such as oppression, migration, displacement, and violence, is crucial for recognizing its present-day impacts. Incorporating traditional healing practices and collaborating with cultural leaders can help reclaim cultural identity and address intergenerational trauma authentically.

Storytelling emerged as a powerful tool for processing and transcending trauma. By sharing their stories, individuals can validate their experiences and break the cycle of negative collective narratives. Storytelling fosters unity and support, helping individuals recognize they are not alone in their struggles.

Ms. Warsame emphasized the importance of trauma-informed care, which involves recognizing triggers and providing appropriate resources, such as therapy and support groups, to help individuals navigate their healing journey.

Regarding accountability and making changes today, Ms. Warsame highlighted the importance of culturally based responses and community interventions. She emphasized that healing intergenerational trauma through culturally responsive programming and youth engagement is vital for breaking the cycle of pain and fostering resilience. Empowering youth by involving them in program design and decision-making fosters a sense of agency and ownership, encouraging them to engage in healing practices and advocate for change in their communities.



Ms. Warsame also noted the importance of mentorship, resilience building, and creating a sense of belonging within programming. Culturally sensitive role models and mentors can profoundly impact the healing process by offering guidance and a safe space for youth to share their stories. Equipping youth with practical coping skills and resilience-building techniques helps them navigate triggers and challenges, promoting lasting well-being.

She stressed the need for long-term, sustainable programming to support Black youth effectively. Short-term initiatives often lack the depth and impact needed to address intergenerational trauma and mental health challenges. Sustainable programs can create a lasting impact by nurturing empowered and resilient youth who can become advocates and mentors within their communities.

Ms. Warsame concluded by calling for more comprehensive and enduring approaches to support the well-being of Black youth. By prioritizing consistent and coherent support, communities can break the cycle of short-term intervention and foster lasting change.

**Key Takeaways: Looking to the Future**

**Long term impact requires long term commitment**

**Interconnectedness of generations**

**Cultural sensitivity & responsiveness**



**Advocacy for systemic change**

**Holistic Approach to well-being**

# Youth Presentation: Experience Hate on University Campus: Online and Offline

DAY 1



## ARUNITA DAS

Arunita Das is a PhD Candidate in the Socio-Legal Studies program at York University. She holds an MA in Socio-Legal Studies and a BA in Sociology. Throughout her graduate studies and work experience with non-profit charitable organizations, Das has been developing research in racism, hate and extremism, colonization, and feminist criminology for over five years. Her current research examines the relationship between online hate speech, hate crime, and free expression laws in Canada.

### Experience Hate on University Campus: Online and Offline

In her presentation, Ms. Das shared the findings from a research project which studied hate on university campuses. The motivation for this project came from observing the hate related activities within university campuses experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students from several universities spoke out against the levels of hate speech and hate motivated violence on their campuses, specifically in 2020 and 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms became the primary means of access to education. Students reported experiencing instances of Zoom bombing, where zoom meetings were hacked and inappropriate and racist content was shared. These instances specifically targeted BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+ and feminist organizations.

### Research Goals

Ms. Das said this research project had three goals. The first was to learn about experience and prevalence of online and offline hate experienced by Canadian university students. The second was to understand the scope of the issue of hate on university campuses across Canada with the rise of e-learning platforms. The third was to understand how universities currently handle cases involving hate within their institution and the services they offer.

### Research Questions

Ms. Das shared the research four main questions of this project: 1) How prevalent is online and offline hate on Canadian universities campuses? 2) Under what context do hate incidents occur? Who is most targeted by hate and why? 3) What are the impacts of online and offline hate incidents on campus for students and particularly for marginalized groups? 4) Are universities doing enough to address ongoing hate on their campuses? Ms. Das stated that Canadian universities are formed from colonial legacies and have long histories of institutional hate and racism within academia and education. The study used descriptive surveys to collect information from a wider sample of university students. 594 students – either current



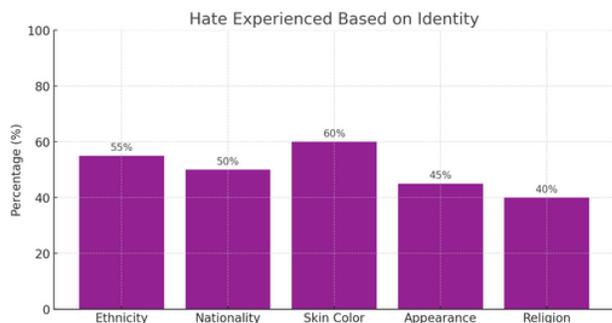
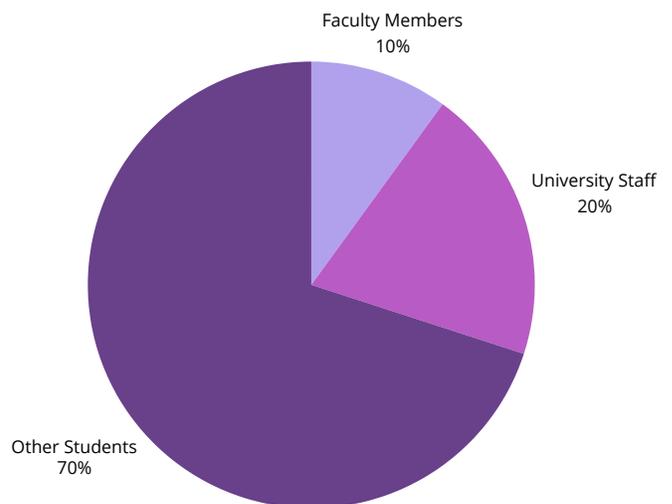
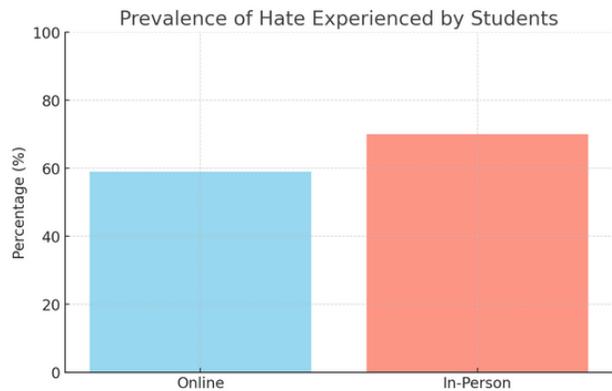
**Key Findings**

Ms. Das stated that the key findings were that there is prevalence of hate in universities: 59% reported experiencing hate online and 70% reported experiencing hate in-person. She stated that students reported experiencing hate online often in class social media pages (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp groups, Discord chats) and that in-person hate was experienced in areas where there are higher rates of students (e.g. lecture halls, residence halls, group events, school related events).

Ms. Das also pointed out that from her findings, most commonly, students experienced hate from other university students, though alarmingly participants also reported experiencing hate from university staff and faculty members. She remarked that this speaks to the fact that there may not be sufficient anti-hate and anti-racism training given to university staff. In addition, she noted that experiencing hate from a peer may be detrimental but experiencing hate from university staff may be even more destructive given the hierarchical power relationship between staff and students.

She observed that students experiencing hate from university staff is a serious issue because university staff represent the university as a whole and are responsible for providing safe spaces to students. Staff demonstrating hateful behaviour may contribute to students’ feelings of unsafety and threaten their safety. Ms. Das found that currently there are higher instances of students reporting experiencing that they experience hate based on their ethnicity/nationality/skin colour/physical appearance/and religion than previously.

In terms of gender, she noted that those who reported experiencing the most hate online, offline or both, identified, in order, as: intersex (100%), queer (95%), males (83%) and females (63%), though results may be skewed by the fact that very few participants in the sample population identified as intersex (n=5) or queer (n=20).



Ms. Das reported that there was a clear association between students experiencing hate and the students' physical, emotional and psychological health. The experience of hate affected their studies, routines, and grades. When asked about a range of emotions participants may feel following a hate incident, she said that more than 60% of the sample reported most often feeling fearful, weak, confused, sad, defenseless, pitiful, hopeless, angry and revengeful. She added that the more students are exposed to different forms of hate, the more their desire to go to class, their daily routine, their grades, and their mental and physical health are negatively affected.

In addition, she relayed that many reported being targeted with diverse forms of hate that are perpetrated by different people, in diverse places and directed towards several of their identity characteristics. Speaking of intersectionality, Ms. Das commented that the more intersecting and overlapping identities a person has, the more hate they may experience, not only in their own institution but in all areas of their lives.

A key finding from this research that Ms. Das highlighted was that students that experienced hate, experienced it more than once and in multiple spaces. She added that approximately 58% of students reported that hate is a problem in their university. Around 80% of the sample stated that they had reached out to either the university or off-campus support services about the hate incident they experienced. Of those students who reached out to their university, she found that only 66% of the respondents reported that the university did address hate. However, only 25% of those participants said that sufficient action has been taken by the university to address the hate. According to Ms. Das, 40% of respondents revealed that their universities did not act appropriately to address the hate, and 15% responded that no action was taken by the university to address the hate they experienced on campus.

According to Ms. Das, students reportedly agreed that their university can do more to prevent hate both online and offline. In the 21st century online spaces are becoming incubators for hate and reaching a wider audience than ever before. In terms of safety online, Ms. Das says that 78% of students reported it is important for students to feel safe online, 73% of students thought that the university should reprimand

### Conclusion and Next Steps

Ms. Das concluded that a large majority of university students perceive that they experience hate due to one or more protective identity characteristics. Ms. Das' findings from her study matches the recent studies of hate crime by Statistics Canada. She found that the groups that experience hate most frequently are: Indigenous groups, Black people, Jewish people, East Asians, South-East Asians, and individuals for their gender identity and gender characteristics. Religion can overlap and intersect. Ms. Das recommended that there is a clear need for universities to deeply examine and address hate and racism within campuses, online and offline. She emphasized the importance of this because a better understanding of hate on campuses, can help Canadian universities support and implement progressive anti-hate, anti-racism policies. Ms. Das concluded that the current findings listed represent a snapshot of a more extensive research agenda and that a full report of the project findings and academic publications will be available later in 2024.

The major takeaways Ms. Das shared were that of the total number of hate occurrences both online and offline, 80% of those incidents took place more than once in the last year. She also made note that both online and offline, there are higher instances of students who report experiencing hate for their: 1) Ethnicity/race/skin 2.) Physical appearance and 3) Religion.

Ms. Das emphasized that hate incidents affect students' mental health, academic growth and sense of safety. She reported that students agree that their universities can do more to prevent hate both online and offline because hate incidents affect students' mental health, academic growth, and sense of safety.

This can directly and indirectly affect graduation rates. She stated that the need for action was reflected in the perspectives of students from the research who agree that their university can do more to prevent hate, both online and offline.

Ms. Das explained that the findings of this research concur with existing research which states that being exposed to and consuming hate speech can have multiple consequences for individuals. She noted that even if not directly victimized, students can still experience lower self-esteem and increased stress and anxiety with exposure to such content. She added that being exposed to hate online or offline can increase exposure to hateful speech which can increase violence online and offline. Finally, Ms. Das called on universities to take action and review the hate on campus and possible systemic

causes related to settler colonialism that are exposing some students to hate more than others.

**Recommendations for universities:**

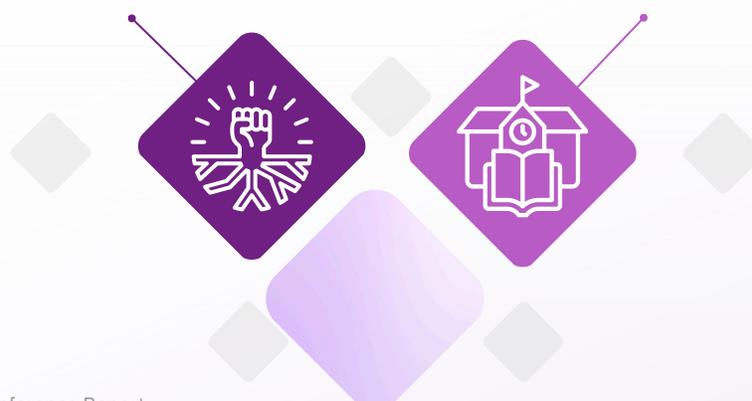
Ms. Das advised that it is important to track the occurrence of hate incidents at the universities. She suggested that this could be a way to allow students to share their experience with someone and to have someone with whom they could talk. She also, proposed that this could be a way to assess the prevalence of hate on campus, know where people are being exposed to hate speech and the effects on students. From this information, universities could develop to combat and address the hate.

Ms. Das advised that there is a need to have meaningful anti hate training for staff and students. She stated that countering hate is a shared responsibility of all actors, sectors and society members. She advised that universities must evaluate their policies and use the expertise of stakeholders and other experts to contribute to meaningful policy change. This also allows students the opportunity to learn about and contribute to university policies and know where to go to access resources when they experience hate incidents.

**Key Points**

**Taking action is important because it will allow a diverse group of students to gain access to education and higher education without the barrier of hate.**

**There is a prevalence of hate in Canadian universities and more progress needs to be made to address the institutional hate and racism within academia and education**





### Imam Horsed Noah

Outreach director of SICO, an umbrella of 7 Islamic centers in Columbus Ohio. Imam Horsed is a board member of faith in public life which is a national platform where faith leaders address social issues that affect us all. Studied under host of Muslim scholars in the traditional learning of Islamic studies, Imam Horsed Noah also travels extensively and lectures on issues like spirituality, social justice and youth empowerment. Imam Horsed Noah has degrees in Biochemistry and microbiology and is currently working on his masters in theology and sociology. Imam Horsed is part of Muslim relief organization that regularly travels to the Horn of Africa and help internally displaced people in the area.

### “Leave a Legacy”

Imam Horsed Noah beautifully started by saying As-salaam Alaikum, which is Arabic for “peace be upon you.” He shared the title of a book called: “Hero on a mission – leading a meaningful life” by Donald Miller. The book highlights the importance of leaving a good legacy, asking questions such as “how do you want to be remembered?” The Imam connected the ideas in this book to the Muslim prophetic roles, of the messengers of God, who left a beautiful legacy.

Next, the Imam poetically recited a verse from Surah Al-Lail from the Quran

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ ۙ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ ۙ وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ ۗ إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ ۙ

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.*

*By the night when it covers, and the day when it shines! And by 'the One' Who created male and female! Surely the ends you strive for are diverse.*

The Imam asserted that humans are created for a reason, a good reason. One of God’s names is Al-Hakim, which means The All-Wise, The Judge of Judges, The One who is correct in His doings. Nothing is random! Imam Noah continued by stating that participants should aim to be leading a meaningful life, which consists of making the right choices. There are excellent organizations in the community that are contributing towards making a difference such as CARE, ISNA, ICNA, (the name of these organizations should be stated next to the acronyms) etc. All are engaged in diverse endeavors. He reminded the participants by saying to them, “Your creation is special, and you are the chosen one, by the same God that choose the prophets.”

Additionally, the Imam emphasized that participants should be working towards purifying their souls and hearts from various diseases: he referred to tazkiyah which is an Arabic term alluding to tazkiyat al-nafs, meaning 'sanctification' or 'purification of the self'. Participants should work towards removing jealousy, ego centric vision, malice, etc., as these vices do not lead towards leaving behind a strong legacy. He continued stating that when participants wake up every morning, they have something on their minds which they desire to accomplish. Participants should ask themselves how they want to be remembered, what kind of legacy they are planning to leave behind? He encouraged participants to donate their time, volunteer.

He pointed out that when one gives, one ought not to give to receive recognition or reputation – but to give for the sake of God. The Imam then asked, participants, how they want to be remembered after their death.

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

Also known as Istirja is an Arabic phrase, mentioned in the second surah of the Quran, which means: "Indeed, we belong to God, and indeed, to Him we return."

Regarding the very pressing topics such as homelessness, overdose, addiction, mental health, the Imam asked what good are participants doing to support people in need? He urged that all participants should be aiming to work towards doing good in this world, while keeping God are the forefront. And for their good deeds, participants surely will be rewarded in this world and in the hereafter (destination: Jannah [heaven])!

### The power of one:

Imam stated that Midaynta Community Services was founded in 1993 by just a few dedicated people, who had a noble vision. Due to their work, all were gathered for the conference! Furthermore, the Imam shared a quick history of Yale University which was established around 1753. It was the first educational endowment by a person who donated \$500. He pointed out that individual decisions and choices can lead towards benefiting and helping others. Regarding Yale, today, more than 30 million people are benefiting from this educational institute. The Imam shared that the Almighty God will pave the way if one has a loving vision. It is a great gift to help those in need. "Fasanuyassiruhu lil'yus'r: Then We will ease him towards [the] ease." The Imam gave two examples of situations that occurred more than 1400 years ago. He explained that there were two people from the same community:

Person A (Abu Bakr) - wanted to leave a good legacy. He woke up and chose to make a positive difference. He wanted to free those who were being oppressed. He wanted to lend a loving, helping hand to a fellow human being. To donate and to be giving to the community.

Person B (Abu Jahl) – left a bad legacy. He woke up and chose to make a negative impact, to harass and cause issues.

The Imam said life is all about the choices made and urged the participants to aim to be like Person A (Abu Bakr) and leave behind a positive legacy! Islam teaches us three main messages: Have knowledge, Maintain your spirituality, Engage in society. He shared that even the first verse God revealed was: IQRA, which is Arabic for READ. The readers of today are the leaders of tomorrow. He encouraged everyone to stand up and engage with the community: to focus on being productive and active members of the community and engage with society. He reminded all that they are commanded to contribute towards everyone, regardless of their background (ethics, religious beliefs etc.). He also emphasized that to attain total peace and harmony, participants should all be engaging in spirituality.

The Imam concluded his presentation by saying: "Oh, people spread peace, feed the hungry, and have good relationships with family and community. And may God bless YOU!"



# Panel 3: Barriers to Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth

DAY 2

- **Nibal Salloum**, Human Rights Defender
- **Megan McGarry**, Police Constable, Toronto Police Service
- **Geran Collymore**, Strategic consultant, Higher Education Professional
- **Said Sheik-Abdi**, Senior Regional Strategic Advisor, International Expert

**Panel Moderator: Ruweida Hassan**, Youth Outreach Worker at Midaynta Community Services.



## Nibal Salloum

Nibal Salloum was born in As-Suwayda south Syria and graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of English Literature from Damascus University faculty of art and culture. Ms. Salloum started her activism in 2007 with the Iraqi children's refugees in Syria and worked with several initiatives to support Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. After 2011 Ms. Salloum was active with the Syrian civil society, concentrating on: Human rights, LGBTQ+ Rights, Gender equality, and social integration as she believes true peace needs a strong human rights base. Ms. Salloum worked with several Syrian organizations such as Center for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD), Dammeh-Hug, International Humanitarian relief and Nuon. In addition to INGOs like

Human Rights Watch “HRW”, The Red Umbrella “TRU” now currently, Ms. Salloum is a project manager at IMPACT, The Northpine Foundation for the project entitled: Fostering Women Led Space for Change -Think outside the box: Barriers are meant to be broken.

### Summary

Ms. Salloum started by saying the youth are not being prioritized in civic spaces and therefore they are not being given the opportunities to make themselves feel worthwhile. When they are included, they are given lower or unpaid positions. This is potentially being done to reduce their voices. The government needs to overcome the issues and break the barriers of youth accessing civic spaces, especially international youth. This can be attained by developing trust and emotionally motivating them. Ms. Salloum said the youth is a vital part of our society.

She asserted that many campaigns started by youth are not very organized, and start off very small - for example, the Black Lives Matter movement, which too started off small, but turned into something larger, and eventually a global matter all due the efforts of the youth.

### Structural barriers that impede youth engagement:

Ms. Salloum shared that there are several structural barriers that come in the way of youth engagement. She started off by outlining the social barrier facing youth. She stated that our youths’ emotions should be attended to correctly.

She opined that youth should not be told where and how they should engage with communicating their emotions. No one should be controlling the emotions of youth – as it is not the job of anyone to be telling another person how to navigate through their own emotions. It is intimidating and limiting when the youth is being told ‘we know better’.

Only the youth should be getting to decide what they say, and when they say it. She then moved to the financial barrier facing youth.

She pointed out that often, the youth are limited in terms of their resources and are focused largely on saving and working towards their future.

Then she mentioned the political barrier facing youth. She declared that newcomers carry the load of the countries from which they have migrated. This includes stories, obstacles, limitations and more. Next Ms. Salloum pointed to the digital barrier facing youth, sharing that not all youth can afford the facilities and resources, and therefore end up having no access technology in civic spaces. Ms. Salloum also pointed out one of the drawbacks of digital platforms. That they reduce the space for in person dialogue. She noted that in person conversation allows for best expression.

Additionally Ms. Salloum highlighted the economic + Covid-19 barriers facing youth. Youth that were unable to have access to civic spaces increased during the Covid-19 period as the economy was sluggish. The sluggish economy added to one of the major impacts of Covid-19, self-isolation. Youths were therefore not socializing. Next Ms. Salloum mentioned the displacement barriers faced by youth. She shared that it should be kept in mind that some groups of youth talk less, fear more and do not have enough physical space to flourish. These groups of youth are often displaced, some are refugees and stateless. The rights of displaced people are a sensitive situation. Many displaced people are migrants, and their identities and unique needs should be respected.

The accessibility barrier faced by youth was another topic Ms. Salloum addressed in her presentation. She highlighted the fact that programs need to be more accessible to all youth. Active listening is the approach that should be applied to youth. Youth should be asked what their needs are so that their needs could be better accommodated, and youths could feel safe and seen.

In addition, Ms. Salloum mentioned that as it relates to accessibility, some young women fear that if they speak up, they may be understood in a different way, as many of them are taught to not be outspoken (speaking up is labeled as the western agenda). She underlined that although women are being encouraged to be more powerful and actively involved, there continues to be some places where it is still extremely difficult for them to do so. She emphasized that this silencing of women should be kept at the forefront and actively addressed. Ms. Salloum suggested a video to watch: Be a woman (12-minute). Ms. Salloum emphasised the importance of inclusion with respect to accessibility. She proposes that instead of encouraging everyone to be supportive and inclusive of each other, people should differentiate among groups. She suggests that there is no need to create independent spaces for each minority group – but to create one effective space where everyone is heard and works as a team. She asserts that migrants make numerous adjustments to survive in a new environment (politically, culturally, etc.).

Especially for migrants, increased compassion should be demonstrated and planned. Opportunities and an exemplar space should be created where all minorities could be seen to work together and understand each other's unique needs. Finally, Ms. Salloum spoke about the rural areas and accessibility. She noted that the youth in the rural areas have even less access to opportunities and access to fewer resources. She highly recommended that these kinds of conferences be planned in rural areas to further enable dialogue with the youth who live there.



### Megan McGarry

Megan McGarry is a Police Constable with the Toronto Police Service. In her 21 years of service, she has worked in the Primary Response Unit, Criminal Investigation Bureau, Youth/Family Violence Unit, Community Response Unit as a School Officer, and the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team. Currently, she is with the Community Partnership and Engagement Unit where she is the Toronto Police Service’s School Board Liaison Officer.

#### Summary

Constable McGarry started by stating: ‘I myself have a youth at home, she is 16’. In addition to being on the road as a police officer she is an active member of the community, a parent, caregiver, aunt, making her that much more of a devoted, intrigued, and eager member here at this conference today.

She declared that ultimately, we have all gathered here for the same end goal which is: to be helping the youth and giving them steps to becoming better human beings; that all were there to support the youth in a better way. She pointed out that it is important for the youth to be heard, that youth need adults whom they can trust, someone they can rely on when they are feeling lost or in need of any type or support. She stressed that this encompasses the need to remind youth of their human rights and telling them to be authentically themselves!

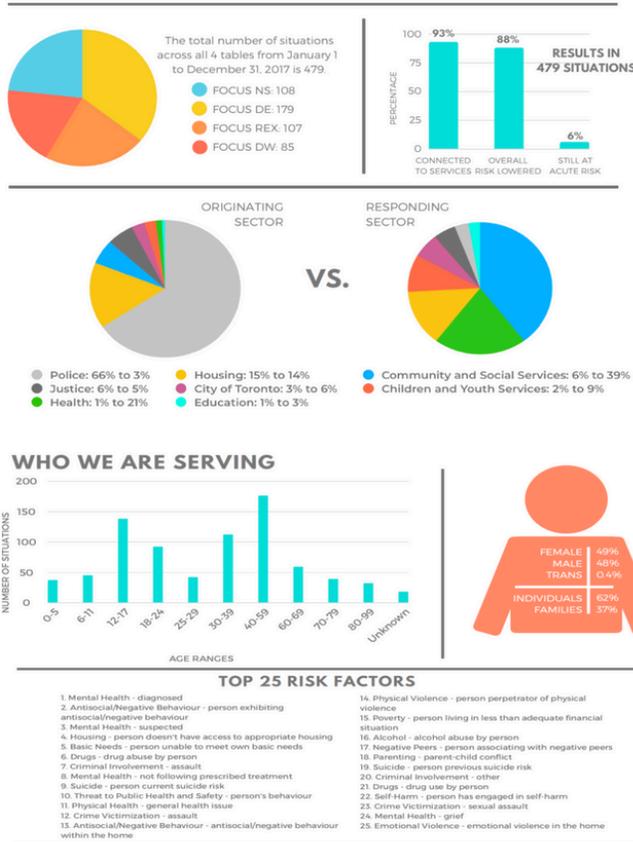
Constable McGarry stated that global pandemics such as COVID-19 and its lockdown created larger concerns about youth. As a police officer and someone who is working closely within the community partnership and engagement unit, she saw isolation increase as did many problems including concerns in areas such as mental health. She added, that she is thankful about society’s progression regarding mental health awareness and that mental health awareness is increasingly becoming the norm. Constable McGarry acknowledged that parents are excellent support

for their children, but when they are not available, youth ought to be able to go to reliable and safe spaces. She advised that parents should be proactive and plan for times when they cannot be present for their children and youth. McGarry shared parents and community need to be thinking of the additional support and connections to which children have access. She recognized that all humans experience difficulties at periods in life. She strongly suggests active preparation for difficult situations. She recommends that parents model and reinforce with their children that it is important and acceptable for one to admit when one has made an error, or when one is not feeling well.

Constable McGarry emphasised that at the present, it is vital to be educated, to be listening and to extend a hand towards the youth. She proposes that this will aid in creating a holistically safer and more peaceful environment for youth in which they can thrive and ultimately succeed. She supports actions instead of only speeches. She notes that it is important to apply and model the solutions that are given to remove the barriers and challenges facing youth.



# FOCUS TORONTO



For example, at the focus tables, TPS works with many organizations that connect clients with the resources they need. It is important to keep in mind that the TPS community partnership and engagement units are just one aspect of community resources available to youth. Constable McGarry said, “Stay woke, and keep in mind that we all have a part to play! Assumptions end up being another large barrier and lead us nowhere.

We must take initiative and be proactive about playing our part.” She pointed out the need to pass forward all the great things learned at the conference, by absolutely acting upon them first. She was aware that there were many actionable items being discussed at the conference, but suggested starting off by offering each other as human beings, compassion, sympathy, education, and learning.

City of Toronto , 2017  
<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/public-safety-alerts/community-safety-programs/focus-toronto/>



Constable McGarry observed that technological advancements are a great asset. She indicated that there ought to be an awareness of the safe, and reliable technology, and available resources (websites, etc.). She informed participants that bullying takes place even on the web. She suggested that resources such as Cybertip.ca, Crime stoppers and Kids Help Phone are available for everyone and that parents/guardians should be aware of them. Constable McGarry added that on The Toronto Police Services website more information on services offered such as who your neighbourhood officer is, the community partnership and engagement unit and much more.

Constable McGarry concluded that all were gathered to work towards creating a safer and more peaceful environment for everyone; one within which it can be ensured children and youth can thrive. She urged for the keeping of an open mindset, to make the world a little bit better and much easier to navigate.



### Geran Collymore

Geran Collymore is a higher education professional and strategic consultant. Geran has a dedicated focus on empowering non-profits and groups to enhance their funding and programming capacity. Geran’s expertise includes championing youth empowerment, fostering collaborative policy solutions, and driving capacity building initiatives for organizations that support marginalized communities.

#### Summary

Ms. Collymore stated that empowered youth are an important part of the architecture of a society that is thriving and successful. She believes youth must press for agency, communicate their needs, and actively shape their present realities and futures. Even at a young age, youth possess wisdom, knowledge and insight on important matters. She praised the conference for being largely organized and implemented by youth in partnership with adults - a "powerful youth-adult partnership" model. Going forward, she encourages more youth directly participating on panels to represent their perspectives.

Ms. Collymore stated youth are the future, so ensuring they take up space in civic life is crucial, including engaging in ongoing dialogues about societal issues impacting them directly. However, she cited barriers preventing youth civic engagement as noted in a 2022 study by Bauml, Smith & Blevins:

- Lack of resources such as time, finances, and transportation
- Lack of accessible information about civic engagement
- Insufficient connections to adults/organizations involved in civic activities
- Social/emotional factors including confidence, and not feeling welcome/heard in civic spaces
- Lack of opportunities and pathways facilitated for youth representation

To address these barriers, three key pathways are proposed:

- Youth-adult partnerships like this conference's model
- Policy and structural changes mandating youth representation on boards/panels
- Youth taking ownership, accountability and demonstrating leadership

She challenged parents, especially new immigrants to Canada, to ensure their children are represented in the civic spaces guiding their futures. Everyone has a role in getting involved in schools, communities, etc. The barriers noted are significant deterrents, but they are not insurmountable.

Ms. Collymore remains committed to supporting Midaynta as the organization continues to champion youth empowerment and representation.



### Ms. Collymore shared how pathways can be created for the youth:

- Partnership - youth adult partnerships. This conference is a product of that very partnership. Where both parties have been active participants in the design and organization of the whole conference.
- Policy and structural change - This could vary from making sure that bylaws are changed to ensure that there must be at least one youth, on any board, on any panel, an agreement that youth must be represented in these spaces, and it must be mandated that youth should be there.
- Ownership – It is important for the youth to be present, and they should have some level of accountability, that even as young people if see that something that does not seem quite right, they must take action... The youth should be speaking up and should understand that they must take ownership of their own future!

Ms. Collymore asked a question of the parents. The answer of the question was important to her, “Are you seeing yourselves, your children being represented in these civic spaces with the understanding that these civic spaces are what will really guide how things evolve for your future, for your children's future?” She urged that all including herself get participating and take leadership. She noted, “We all have a part to play by getting involved within our schools, communities and more.” Ms. Collymore concluded her talk by saying Midaynta is youth focused, and she hopes it continues that way.





## Said Sheik-Abdi

Said Sheik-Abdi is a widely recognized international expert and speaker focusing on humanitarian aid, diaspora communities, and partnerships. He has provided advice to governments and communities in several countries. Said Sheik-Abdi has been invited numerous times to the White House and State Department of the United States of America to offer guidance on diaspora, remittances, and humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa. Notably, he was among the few Africans selected to advise President Obama's first trip to Africa.

### Summary

Said Sheik-Abdi started by observing that the youth are the ones who are driving the Midaynta organization and taking it to the next level. He gave thanks to government of Canada and the police, which he says is an excellent partnership, and hopes that the partnership continues to flourish and only grow. Said Sheik-Abdi remarked that youth participation seldom seen and few youths are typically at the table when important dialogues are taking place. He posed two questions: "How can we create a more inclusive platform? And how do we create advances in accessibility and availability of civic spaces that are both practical and inspiring?"

He spoke about the importance of collaboration between government and social work communities. He also indicated that transparency is important. Social communities need to provide transparency for people who offer financial support, this aids in building trust. He stressed education and urged participant's to educate themselves on current happenings. Said Sheik-Abdi referred to the access and availability of technology and resources, and the need to take advantage of them. One example he suggested was to use social media for good and positive change. Said Sheik Abdi suggested youth should be participating in the community. He is of the view that the youth need to involve themselves in the community for it to completely thrive. He also urged the adults to get involved within the community.

He strongly advised that both youth and adults participate in community. According to him,

**"You must get up and physically get involved; together we can reach far."**

Said Sheik-Abdi proposed that participants should be investing and giving back to the community. He urged the community to invest time and resources in the youth so they can access civic spaces which are available in the community. According to him, "The way time works is that either you are investing it, or you are wasting it." He proposed the 80/20 principle – If parents and youth give back to the community, 20% effort produces 80% of achievement goals!

Said Sheik-Abdi remarked that Canada is always generous! When someone who has migrated to Canada actively contributes their time and efforts to participate in organizations such as Midaynta, they receive personal recognition and rewards. In addition to the personal honours, the contributions benefit Canada and gives recognition of the country of origin of the participant. Said Sheik-Abdi commented that some youth may wonder what they can do. Said Sheik-Abdi's simple solution is "doing the doable".

“You do not have to know how to do everything, the big things, instead focus on making the dots connect. There are many organizations and a large number of individuals who can mentor you.”

Many years ago, back home in Minneapolis I was working, my family was being taken care of, I was getting to spend time with family, but I knew I wanted to give back to the community and back home. It was one simple call of mine that led me to creating a successful foundation back in 2011. Today that organization has 400 Somali employees with a 20 million budget. My little effort made a big difference.

Said Sheik-Abdi also highlighted the power of digital platforms when it comes to connecting and mobilizing young individuals, showcasing to them how technology can be the catalyst for positive change in their engagement with civic activities. He shared that communities could leverage the social media influence! He explained that through leveraging the social media influence, you can change policies can be changed and a positive impact can be made in community. He further discouraged others from spreading hate and division. He reminded the audience that everyone even in the room has value, and adds something positive to their community, their country, and their world!



## Panel 4: Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media

DAY 2

- **Akaash Maharaj**, Ambassador-at-Large for GOPAC
  - **Dr. Fahad Ahmad**, Assistant Professor at TMU
- Panel Moderator: Ahmed Mohdhar**, Case Worker at Midaynta Community Services.



### Akaash Maharaj

Ambassador-at-Large for the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC). He represents the international alliance of democratically-elected legislators in its work combatting corruption, strengthening good government, and upholding the rule of law. The United Nations selected him to speak for the world's legislators in the General Assembly Chamber, on bringing kleptocrats to justice. He also serves as a Senior Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs, and as Policy Director for Nature Canada. Earlier in his life, Akaash was an international athlete for Canada, and was a triple gold medalist at the International Championships of Equestrian Skill-at-Arms. He earned his

Master of Arts from Oxford University, and was the first overseas student elected President of the student government in the history of the 900-year-old University. He completed further studies at the Sorbonne Université and the United Nations University. His personal web site is [www.Maharaj.org](http://www.Maharaj.org)

#### Summary

Akaash Maharaj's presentation addresses the significant challenge of countering violent extremist narratives in media. He emphasizes that while the overwhelming majority of Somali-Canadians are uninvolved in the conflict in Somalia, media representations often skew public perception, contributing to stigmatization and misinformed policy decisions. Maharaj advocates for a multi-faceted approach involving education, media reform, and community engagement to foster a more accurate and positive portrayal of Muslim and Somali youth in Canada.

#### Views of Somali Youth

Maharaj highlights a quote from Hamda, a Somali-Canadian youth, who articulates a profound sense of Canadian identity that embraces multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence: "Being Canadian is being allowed to be who you are and celebrating other people's cultures."

It's being a part of an experiment where you're curious to see how it's going to come out, but it's really trying the whole peace-on-earth thing where you can have people from different religions living together: Can we live amicably together? That's what being Canadian is. Being celebrated for who you are, but learning so much about everybody else." This sentiment underscores the desire for inclusion and understanding among Somali-Canadian youth.

#### Media Representations of Muslim Youth

Maharaj points out the pervasive negative portrayal of Muslim youth in Canadian media. Articles about Muslims often focus on immigration, while those specifically about Muslim youth tend to emphasize terrorism, radicalization, gang violence, drug trafficking, and crime. He provides a stark statistic: since 1960, Canadian Muslims are three times more likely to be killed for being Muslim than to kill others. Maharaj criticizes the disproportionate media coverage of violent events involving Muslims compared to other incidents.

For instance, the CBC, Globe and Mail, and Toronto Star published four times as many stories about the Boston Marathon bombing as about the Quebec City Islamic Cultural Centre shooting. This imbalance distorts public understanding and can lead to policies that do not reflect the true nature of threats facing the community. Quoting a powerful statement on the influence of media, Maharaj echoes Malcolm X:

“The press is so powerful in its image-making role, it can make the criminal look like he’s the victim and make the victim look like he’s the criminal. If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

This highlights the media's role in shaping public attitudes and the potential for harmful misrepresentations. He noted that since 2014, Canadians motivated by extremist ideological views have killed more people on Canadian soil than those motivated by religious or political extremism. Yet, media coverage and public discourse often do not reflect this reality, skewing the focus towards religiously motivated violence.

### Proposals by Somali Youth

To counteract negative narratives and foster positive change, Somali youth propose several measures:

- Expand education for new Canadian citizens about Canadian values (80% support).
- Promote public education to offer balanced views on international conflicts (71%).
- Revise public school curricula to include balanced discussions of international conflict (64%) and highlight the importance of living together in peace (60%).
- Facilitate dialogues between people on opposing sides of conflicts (53%).
- Expand multiculturalism policies (47%) and fund multi-faith and multi-ethnic community programs (47%).
- Implement stricter laws against hate (42%).
- Expand community policing resources to prevent inter-community violence (36%).
- A minority supports reducing immigration from certain countries (16%).

### Changing the Narrative

Maharaj concludes with examples of initiatives aimed at changing the narrative and supporting at-risk youth:

- Project Turn Around: A gang prevention and intervention program for youth at risk or involved in the criminal justice system.
- Youth Justice: A holistic, trauma-informed, and strength-based approach to divert youth from entering jails.
- Youth Outreach Workers: Empower and support youth by providing tools for education and employment pathways.
- Project Real Talk: A community research initiative to amplify youth voices against violence.
- Mending a Crack in the Sky: Mothers advocating for safe spaces for community healing and mobilization.





### Dr. Fahad Ahmad

Dr. Fahad Ahmad is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology at Toronto Metropolitan University and a research affiliate at the Institute of Islamic Studies at University of Toronto. He co-edits a book series titled, *Dimensions: Islam, Muslims, and Critical Thought*, for University of Toronto Press. Dr. Ahmad is a community engaged scholar whose research intersects structural Islamophobia; the racialized practices of national security; civil society and resistance; and community oriented approaches to philanthropy. His scholarship is informed by 15 years of work experience in community and nonprofit organizations in Canada and the U.S.

#### Summary

Dr. Ahmad began by expressing, "I learned a lot from the different speakers." Dr. Ahmad spoke about how Counter Violence Extremism (CVE) programs adversely affects Muslim communities and organizations. He made the case that because — CVE evolved as a specific response to manage the problem of domestic Muslim terrorism — CVE negatively impacts Muslim community and community organizations. He concluded with a caution against expanding CVE and applying it toward tackling white supremacy. Dr. Ahmad delved into the problem of "radicalization", which CVE seeks to combat.

He argued that "radicalization" has gained specific significance during the WoT with seemingly "ordinary" Muslims, born and raised in Western countries, commit acts of terrorism. "Radicalization" came to be understood as a process by which Muslims move toward "extremism", yet what constitutes extremism or who the radicalized are, is never defined. The discourse surrounding radicalization tends to disproportionately focus on Muslims, framing them through a lens of suspicion.

Consequently, Dr. Ahmad stated that CVE initiatives often target Muslim minority communities, embedding national security priorities within social, cultural, and educational spheres. Preventive programming, which constitutes the largest segment of CVE initiatives, aims to deter future acts of terrorism through various interventions, including policing, education, and psychosocial support. However, the targeting of youth in CVE initiatives raises concerns about potential stigmatization and surveillance within these communities.

Furthermore, CVE is often presented as an alternative to more punitive measures, such as incarceration or deportation, emphasizing community-based interventions. However, the exclusive focus on Muslim communities in recent years raises questions about the effectiveness and fairness of these approaches.

Because CVE has almost exclusively targeted Muslims, it reinforces the idea that there is something inherent to Islam or Muslims making them prone to radicalization.

Dr. Ahmad offers various critiques of CVE from the academic literature: it establishes Muslims in the west as the “suspect community” and treats Muslim youth as having the risk to committing future acts of terrorism.

Dr. Ahmad then discussed the evolution of CVE in Canada. After this, he presented findings of his research on how CVE has impacted Muslim community organizations, primarily drawing from qualitative interviews he conducted with various organizations across the country. He highlighted three findings: 1) that Muslim organizations think the problem of “radicalization” is not inherent to the community but rather imposed upon them; 2) in CVE there are no neutral partnerships between government agencies and Muslim organization because these government agencies can grant or withdraw legitimacy to Muslim organizations; and 3) CVE fosters a climate of Islamophobia by normalizing the idea that Muslims are a “problem community.”

Dr. Ahmad concludes by stating that CVE is a “racial project” that is based on questioning the full national belonging of Muslims.

He suggests that expanding CVE is not the right answer to address other harms like white supremacist violence because it still does not reckon with Canada’s history of harms to Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people in the name of national security.

In summary, Mr. Ahmad warns that the renewed focus on radicalization within the context of counterterrorism efforts has significant implications for Muslim minority communities, often perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing surveillance measures. It underscores the need for more nuanced approaches to address the complex issue of extremism.



**Please Note:** Not all panelist summaries have been included in panel 4 as they have opted out for various reasons.

# Recommendations

## **DAY 1: Keynote Address 1: Disruptive convergence the internet, trauma, and violence**

The panelists collectively addressed the complex nature of identity formation among youth and provided several overlapping recommendations to support young people in navigating socio-cultural pressures. Here are the combined recommendations:

### **Acknowledge Multifaceted Identities**

Young people possess multiple, intersecting identities that must be understood and respected. Shaikh Habeeb Alli, Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, and Imam Horsed Noah all emphasized the importance of acknowledging that young people possess multifaceted identities, which include cultural, religious, gender, and social dimensions. These intersecting identities are often influenced by their environment, such as family, community, and societal expectations. Schools and community programs must adopt an inclusive approach that respects and acknowledges these various aspects of a young person's identity. For instance, Shaikh Habeeb Alli shared an anecdote about a young Somali man who struggled with his identity after moving to Canada and felt disconnected, leading to unfavorable situations. He highlighted that recognizing and supporting these identities can prevent such adverse situations. Educational systems should implement curricula that include teacher diversity training and inclusive programs catering to different cultural and religious backgrounds. Furthermore, it is essential to create safe spaces, whether physical (like community centers and support groups) or virtual (such as online forums), where young people can explore and discuss their identities without fear of judgment. These environments support youth in exploring and understanding their intersectional identities, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

### **Support Creative Expression**

Dr. Hamdi Mohamed highlighted creative expression's therapeutic and empowering role in helping young people process their experiences and build resilience. Encouraging the use of arts, such as poetry, music, and visual arts, allows youth to articulate their emotions and stories, fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging. Dr. Mohamed pointed out how individuals like K'naan and Ifrah Mansour have used their artistic talents to share their narratives and inspire resilience in others. By incorporating creative arts into educational and community programs, young people are provided with a powerful outlet to express personal and collective experiences, which is particularly beneficial for those dealing with trauma or identity struggles. This expression can also promote healing and emotional well-being, making it a valuable tool in youth development. Schools and communities should actively support artistic pursuits, offering workshops, events, and platforms where youth can showcase their talents and connect with others who share similar experiences.

## Recommendations Cont.

### Promote Cultural and Faith-based Strength

Imam Horsed Noah and Dr. Hamdi Mohamed underscored the importance of cultural and faith-based identities as sources of strength and resilience for young people. Encouraging youth to draw on their cultural heritage and religious faith provides a solid foundation for their identity and helps them feel secure and valued. Supporting young people in connecting with their cultural roots can involve organizing cultural events, language classes, and community gatherings that celebrate and preserve their heritage. Faith-based programs, such as religious education and youth groups, offer guidance and a sense of purpose. Emphasizing community values like interdependence, service, and mutual support reinforces a collective identity, fostering a supportive environment where young people can thrive. These approaches help build resilience and create a sense of belonging and security.

### Limit Harmful Social Media Exposure

Imam Horsed and Dr. Ghayda Hassan discussed social media's profound impact on identity and societal cohesion. Dr. Hassan emphasized how social media contributes to social polarization and the spread of divisive content through personalized algorithms, which can exacerbate biases and conflicts. Dr. Hassan highlighted the importance of critical thinking and the need for a public health approach to counteract the negative effects of online interactions. Dr. Hassan pointed out that social media often promotes dystopian narratives, which extremist groups exploit to attract youth by offering simplistic explanations and solutions to their grievances. On the other hand, Imam Horsed focused on the identity crisis that young people face, exacerbated by the excessive time spent on social media. He highlighted how advertisements and online content can confuse and distort youths' sense of identity, making it difficult for them to engage with their communities positively. Imam Horsed stressed the importance of resilience, derived from firm principles and spirituality, to withstand negative influences such as radicalization and addiction. Imam Horsed also underscored the detrimental effects of bullying, particularly on Muslim youth, and called for proactive community engagement and support to foster a strong sense of belonging and identity. Together, both perspectives underline the critical need for awareness, education, and community support to mitigate the adverse effects of social media on youth identity and societal harmony.

### Foster Resilience through Faith and Community Engagement

All three panelists, Shaikh Habeeb Alli, Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, and Imam Horsed Noah, agreed on the significance of building resilience through faith and community engagement. Resilience is essential for young people to withstand societal pressures and develop a strong sense of self. Teaching resilience through faith involves moral guidance, emotional support, and a sense of purpose derived from religious teachings. Shaikh Habeeb Alli highlighted how reconnecting with faith helped a young man find a sense of belonging and purpose after a period of extremism and incarceration. Furthermore, active participation in community activities, such as volunteering, social clubs, and community service, helps youth develop a sense of responsibility and belonging. These activities provide opportunities to build social networks and support systems, reinforcing a stable identity. Emphasizing solid principles and values like honesty, integrity, and respect within the community and through faith teachings further strengthens youth identity and resilience.

## Recommendations Cont.

### Summary

The combined recommendations from the panelists at the Youth Resiliency Conference highlight the importance of recognizing and supporting youth's multifaceted identities, encouraging creative expression, promoting cultural and faith-based strength, limiting harmful social media exposure, and fostering resilience through faith and community engagement. These comprehensive strategies are designed to help young people navigate socio-cultural pressures and develop a positive and resilient sense of self, ensuring they are well-supported in their journey toward identity formation and personal growth.

### Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma

The panel on Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma featured insightful contributions from Ms. Ramdyal, Ms. Ahmed, and Ms. Warsame, each offering unique perspectives and actionable strategies for addressing this profound issue.

#### Balancing Trauma with Positive Memories

Ms. Bibi Ramdyal shared her deeply personal story, highlighting how intergenerational trauma has affected her family, tracing back to her roots in Guyana, where her father descended from enslaved Africans and indentured Indians and her mother from an indentured laborer. Her narrative vividly illustrated the transmission of trauma through generations, with harrowing stories from her grandmother about the voyage from India, including the tragic loss of her sister being thrown overboard. However, she emphasized the healing power of balancing these traumatic memories with happy stories, which her grandmother also shared, helping to alleviate some of the emotional burden. Ms. Ramdyal distinguished between simple and complex trauma and explained how trauma could persist across up to six generations if not addressed. She pointed out the symptoms of unresolved trauma, such as emotional numbness and hypervigilance, which can lead to anger and irritability, affecting familial relationships and youth development. She emphasizes the importance of openly conversing about past traumas, sharing positive memories, seeking therapy, and leveraging community and spiritual resources. She underscored the importance of training therapists within equity-deserving communities to ensure culturally relevant support, aiming to build a community that fosters understanding and healing.

#### Humor as a Mask for Trauma / Holistic Healing Strategy

Ms. Marwa Ahmed built on these themes by introducing a poignant saying: "Our family has passed down generational trauma instead of generational wealth." She used this to emphasize how humor sometimes masks more profound issues. She defined transgenerational trauma and elaborated on its causes, including abuse, discrimination, natural disasters, and war. She shared her research on Somali Canadian youth, illustrating how unresolved trauma in parents can manifest in children through trauma transference. Ms. Ahmed's approach to healing included a holistic strategy encapsulated in the anagram RECLAIM, which stands for Reflection, Education and Empowerment, Counselling and Therapy, Letting Go, Acceptance, Inner Healing, and Mindful Boundaries. She advocated for culturally sensitive and holistic therapies that address emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions, emphasizing the importance of incremental progress and protecting one's peace during the healing process.

## Recommendations Cont.

### Mental Health in the Black Community

Ms. Warsame's panel discussion on mental health in Black communities highlighted the growing importance of discussing it in the digital age. She highlighted the unique challenges faced by youth, such as academic pressures, body image concerns, and social acceptance, which can lead to burnout and negatively impact mental well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic and drug/opioid crisis have exacerbated mental health issues, causing loneliness and depression. Ms. Warsame also discussed intergenerational trauma, recommending a multi-faceted approach to healing it. She advocated for culturally based responses, mentorship, resilience-building, and long-term, sustainable programming for Black youth. Her insights and recommendations were practical and profound, advocating for systemic changes and long-term support.

### Panel 2: Youth Presentation: Combatting hate and fostering supportive environments

Arunita Das's study on hate on university campuses revealed a significant prevalence of hate incidents targeting BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and feminist organizations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when online platforms became primary educational tools. The study found that 59% of students experienced hate online and 70% in-person, often perpetrated by peers and university staff. Das emphasized the detrimental effects of hate on students' mental, emotional, and physical health, as well as their academic performance. The intersectionality of hate experiences indicated that individuals with multiple marginalized identities face compounded discrimination. Hate incidents recur across multiple contexts, severely impacting students' sense of safety and well-being. Das concluded with actionable recommendations for universities, including tracking hate incidents, providing meaningful anti-hate training for staff and students, and developing policies that actively combat hate and foster a supportive environment. These measures are crucial for ensuring diverse groups of students can access education without barriers posed by hate and discrimination.

### DAY 2: Keynote Address: Social Issues

#### Panel 3: Barriers to Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth

This panel brought together diverse voices to address the barriers faced by youth in accessing civic spaces, offering insightful perspectives and actionable solutions.

#### Promoting Youth Engagement and Inclusion in Civic Spaces:

The panelists unanimously highlighted the critical need for greater representation of youth in civic spaces. Nibal Salloum emphasized addressing various barriers, including social, financial, and displacement obstacles, to ensure inclusivity. She stressed the importance of active listening and collaboration to empower marginalized youth.

Megan McGarry emphasized creating safe spaces for youth, particularly considering global pandemics, to combat isolation and safeguard mental health. She called for proactive measures from parents and communities, emphasizing tangible actions and awareness of resources to address issues like cyberbullying.

## Recommendations Cont.

Geran Collymore focused on policy changes to mandate youth representation in civic dialogues. She emphasized the importance of youth-adult partnerships, highlighting youth agency, accountability, and leadership. Collymore challenged parents and communities to invest in youth and create supportive environments for their development.

### Active youth participation:

Said Sheik-Abdi emphasized community involvement and investment in youth, advocating for active participation in creating positive change. He encouraged leveraging digital platforms for social good and emphasized the importance of mentorship and collaboration. Sheik-Abdi highlighted the value of immigrant contributions to Canada and urged individuals to take tangible steps toward community engagement.

### Establish approaches to combat extremism:

Dr. Fahad Ahmad provided a critical perspective on Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs, particularly their negative impact on Muslim communities. He cautioned against expanding CVE to address white supremacist violence, citing its racialized approach and implications for Muslim minority communities. Ahmad underscored the need for nuanced approaches that address extremism without perpetuating stereotypes or reinforcing surveillance measures.

### Summary

The panelists collectively emphasized the importance of creating inclusive, accessible, and supportive civic spaces for youth. Their insights and recommendations provide valuable guidance for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders seeking to address barriers to youth engagement and empower the next generation.



# Appendix A: Conference Overview

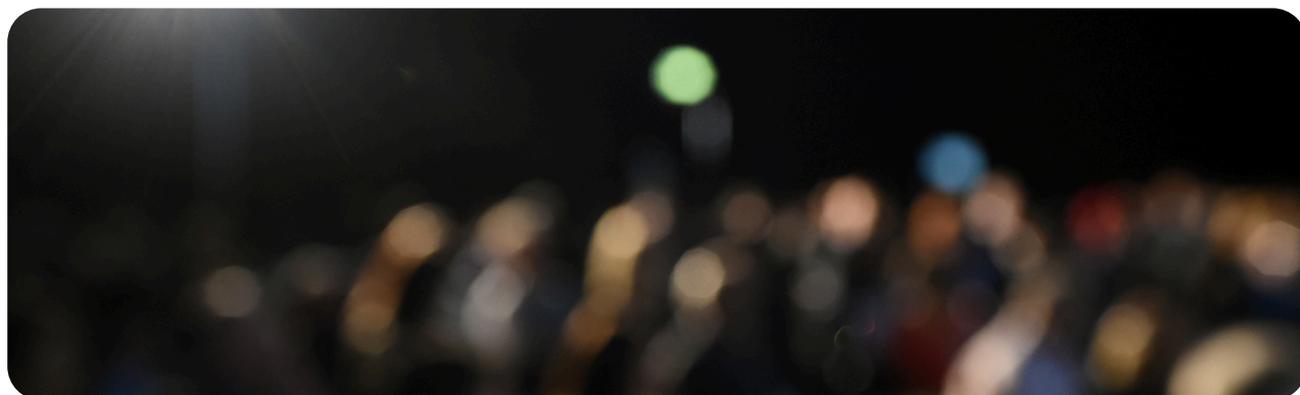
In the year 2023, the purpose of the 5th Annual Conference is to build civil society’s capacity to respond to violent extremism and breakdown barriers to accessing civic spaces for youth. This conference will bring together multiple concerned stakeholders to address youth radicalization. The conference’s major themes will be education, identity crisis, mental health, sense of belonging, and family connection.

The objectives of the conference are:

1. To increase awareness of the link between mental health and youth radicalization by achieving a strong connection between young people worldwide as well as creating safe spaces and lifting young voices through resilience education.
2. To create tangible solutions for youth radicalization nationally and internationally through knowledge translation
3. To mobilize diverse actors to counter violent extremist narratives on the Internet and on social media

This year’s conference will be divided into four panels. Below are the four panels:

Panel #	Panel Title
Panel 1	Sociocultural Pressure on Youth Identity + Intersectionality of Culture and Faith
Panel 2	Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma
Panel 3	Barriers in Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth
Panel 4	Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media



# Panel Descriptions

Panel	Description
<b>Panel 1: Sociocultural Pressure on Youth Identity + Intersectionality of Culture and Faith</b>	<p>This panel will explore how community plays a role in shaping one’s identity. Panel will discuss various influences that impact the identity formation of young people, such as family, peers, and media.</p> <p>Panel will also discuss the impact of community and environment on youth identity development, the significance of community leaders initiating conversations about faith and identity development, and how to build a multifaceted sense of self by acknowledging overlapping social identities.</p>
<b>Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma</b>	<p>During the panel discussion, the speakers will discuss research that sheds light on the connection between intergenerational trauma and mental health. They will delve into the origins of intergenerational trauma and provide information on available resources for mental health treatment.</p>
<b>Panel 3: Barriers in Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth</b>	<p>Panel will address and recognize the structural and systemic barriers to youth civic engagement. It will also discuss the importance of educating youth on the aspect of the value of civic engagement and increasing accessibility and availability of civic spaces.</p>
<b>Panel 4: Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media</b>	<p>Panel will address the role of false perceptions in media and their contribution to creating wide narratives on youth. Panel will also look at the effects of extremist narratives on public opinion and in turn the direct effects on youth.</p>



# Appendix B: Agenda

Day 1 Agenda - Friday August 11, 2023	
Time	Agenda
<b>8:30am – 9:00am</b>	<b>Reception</b>
9:00am – 9:05am	Land Acknowledgement
9:05am – 9:10am	Welcome Remarks
9:10am – 9:30am	Dignitary Remarks
9:30am – 10:15am	<b>Day 1 Keynote Address</b> <b>Dr. Ghayda Hassan</b> , Clinical Psychologist and Professor of Clinical Psychology at UQAM University
10:15am – 10:30am	15 min break
<b>10:30am – 11:50am</b>	<b>Panel 1: Sociocultural Pressure on Youth Identity &amp; Intersectionality of Culture and Faith</b> <b>Moderator: Yasmin Yusuf</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Imam Horsed Noah</b>, Outreach director of SICO, Faith in Public Life, Muslim Relief Organization</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Hamdi Mohamed</b>, Organizational Transformation Consultant, Social Historian, and Researcher</li> <li>• <b>Habeeb Alli</b>, Executive director for One Love Family Services, Muslim Chaplain, Author</li> </ul>
<b>11:50am – 12:05pm</b>	<b>Panel 1: Q &amp; A</b>
12:05pm - 12:20pm	15 min break
<b>12:20pm – 1.15pm</b>	<b>Youth Presentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Arunita Das</b>, PhD Candidate in Socio-Legal Studies, MA in Socio-Legal Studies, BA in Sociology</li> <li>• <b>Midaynta Presentation</b></li> </ul>
<b>1.15pm – 2.15pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
2.15pm – 3:35pm	<b>Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma</b> <b>Moderator: Shamsa Mohamed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bibi Ramdyal</b>, MSW, RSW</li> <li>• <b>Marwa Ahmed</b>, Curriculum and Training Specialist at the CMHA Toronto</li> <li>• <b>Hibaq Warsame</b>, Youth for Change Coordinator</li> </ul>
3:35pm – 3.50pm	Panel 2: Q & A
<b>3.50pm – 4.00pm</b>	<b>Closing + Networking</b>

## Day 2 Agenda - Saturday August 12, 2023

Time	Agenda
8:30am – 9:00am	<b>Reception</b>
9:00am – 9:05am	Land Acknowledgement
9:05am – 9:10am	Welcome Remarks
9:10 am – 9:25am	Day 1 Recap
9:25am – 9:40pm	Poetry or Dignitary Remarks
<b>9:40am – 10.25am</b>	<b>Day 2 Keynote Address</b> <b>Imam Horsed Noah</b> , Outreach director of SICO, Faith in Public Life, Muslim Relief Organization
<b>10:25am – 10:40am</b>	<b>15 min break</b>
<b>10:40am – 12:00pm</b>	<b>Panel 3: Barriers in Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth</b> <b>Moderator: Ruweida Hassan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nibal Salloum</b>, Human Rights Defender</li> <li>• <b>Abdirahman Nur Mohamed</b> Aka Dinari Somali Ambassador</li> <li>• <b>Megan McGarry</b>, Police Constable, Toronto Police Service</li> <li>• <b>Said Sheik-Abdi</b>, Senior Regional Strategic Advisor, International Expert</li> </ul>
12:00pm – 12:15pm	Panel 3: Q & A
<b>12:15pm – 1:05pm</b>	<b>Youth Presentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Zeynah</b>, Shoot for Peace, Kick Back Connect</li> <li>• <b>Hamza</b>, Poet, Mental Health Facilitator</li> <li>• Midaynta Presentation</li> </ul>
<b>1:05pm – 1:50pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
1.50pm – 3:10pm	<b>Panel 4: Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media</b> <b>Moderator: Ahmed Mohdhar</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lucky Omaar</b>, Project Manager for the Women Peace and Security Project</li> <li>• <b>Akaash Maharaj</b>, Ambassador-at-Large for the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC)</li> <li>• <b>Abukar Arman</b>, Former Diplomat, Author</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Fahad Ahmed</b>, Assistant Professor</li> </ul>
3:10pm – 3:25pm	Panel 4: Q & A
<b>3:25pm – 3:35pm</b>	<b>Closing Remarks/Adjournment of Conference</b>

# Appendix C: Keynote speakers

## Day 1 Keynote:



### DR. GHAYDA HASSAN

Dr. Ghayda Hassan is a clinical psychologist and professor of clinical psychology at UQAM university in Montreal and has several research, clinical and community based national and international affiliations. She is the director of the Canadian Practitioner Network for the Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (RPC-PREV; funded by PS Canada; <https://cpnprev.ca>). She is also a UNESCO co-chair in Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence (UNESCO-PREV; <http://chaireunesco-prev.ca/fr/acceuil/>). She currently sits as the Chair of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) or the GIFCT (Global Internet Forum for Countering Terrorism; <https://gifct.org>)

She is a researchers and senior clinical consultant at the SHERPA-RAPS (SHERPA subteam RAPS for Research and Action on Radicalisation and Social Suffering ; ([http://www.sherpa\\_recherche.com/fr/recherche-pratiques/souffrancesocialeetradicalisation/](http://www.sherpa_recherche.com/fr/recherche-pratiques/souffrancesocialeetradicalisation/)) at the CIUSSS Center-West of the island of Montreal. She is a member of national and international committees such as: the RCMP management advisory board, the Independent Advisory Board of the GIFCT, and a member of the expert advisory group on revised legislative and regulatory framework for harmful content online. Her systematic reviews, research and clinical activities are centred around four main areas of clinical cultural psychology: 1) Social suffering, intercommunity relations, radicalization and extremist violence ; 2) Intervention in family violence & cultural diversity ; 2) Identity, belonging and mental health of children and adolescents from ethnic/ religious minorities ; 3) working with vulnerable immigrants and refugees.

## Day 2 Keynote:



### IMAM HORSED NOAH

Outreach director of SICO, an umbrella of 7 islamic centers in Columbus Ohio. Imam Horsed is a board member of faith in public life which is a national platform where faith leaders address social issues that affect us all. Studied under host of Muslim scholars in the traditional learning of Islamic studies , Imam Horsed also travels extensively and lectures on issues like spirituality, social justice and youth empowerment. Imam Horsed Noah has a degree in Biochemistry and microbiology and is currently working on his masters in theology and sociology. Imam Horsed is part of Muslim relief organization that regularly travels to horn office Africa and help internally displaced people in the area .

# Panelist Descriptions

**Panel 1: Sociocultural Pressure on Youth Identity & Intersectionality of Culture and Faith**  
**Moderator: Yasmin Yusuf**  
**Speaker 1 - Imam Horsed Noah      Speaker 3 – Habeeb Alli**  
**Speaker 2 - Hamdi Mohamed**



**IMAM HORSED NOAH**

Outreach director of SICO, an umbrella of 7 Islamic centers in Columbus Ohio. Imam Horsed is a board member of Faith in Public Life, which is a national platform where faith leaders address social issues that affect us all. Studied under the host of Muslim scholars in the traditional learning of Islamic studies, Imam Horsed also travels extensively and lectures on issues like spirituality, social justice and youth empowerment. Imam Horsed Noah has a degree in Biochemistry and microbiology and is currently working on his masters in theology and sociology. Imam Horsed is part of a Muslim relief organization that regularly travels to the Horn of Africa and helps internally displaced people in the area.



**DR. HAMDI MOHAMED**

Dr. Hamdi Mohamed is an organizational transformation consultant, social historian, and researcher. She is the Founder and Principal at Kaafi Consulting and Co-Founder at Kaafi Integrative Health. She works in the areas of organizational development, community building, and research.

A deep commitment to transformative change, liberation, and communal healing guides Dr. Mohamed's life, work, and research. Serving in the non-profit sector leadership for over 20+ years, including being the former Executive Director of the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) and the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC), she initiated and designed groundbreaking and socially innovative youth programs. She lectured widely on refugee resettlement, human rights, anti-racism, public policy, and gender and politics in North America, Europe and Africa. She published several research papers and contributed to numerous scholarly works, including books, international conferences, and seminars. Her academic research focuses on African diasporic experiences, community building, social activism, and Afro-Islamic healing practices.

Dr. Mohamed has received several leadership awards recognizing her community service and professional achievements. Some awards include being named a Community Builder by the Black History Ottawa and being recognized as one of the Top 10 Inspiring Citizens to Watch in Ottawa in 2010. She holds a PhD and MA in History from the University of Ottawa and a BA in African History and English Literature from the Somali National University.

**See my LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/drmohamedx/> for more details.**



### SHAIKH HABEEB ALLI

Originates from Guyana where he studied at Queen’s College and then traveled to India where he graduated with a Masters in Islamic Theology and Arabic Language from Deoband Darul Uloom, and also a Diploma in Journalism. Sh. Habeeb has authored twenty-six titles on Islam and poetry including Chaplaincy. He is a member of the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians and the Canadian Council of Imams. Sh. Habeeb presently serves as Executive Director for One Love Family Services and Muslim Chaplain with Correctional Services in Ontario Federal Institutions and Multi faith Chaplain with Toronto Long Term Care. He has been active in promoting Islamic Chaplaincy with the One Love Gala and the One Love Podcast.

### Panel 2: Mental Health and Healing Intergenerational Trauma

**Moderator: Muna Ali**

**Speaker 1 - Bibi Ramdyal**

**Speaker 3 – Hibaq Warsame**

**Speaker 2 - Marwa Ahmed**



### BIBI RAMDYAL, MSW, RSW

An anti-racist Social Worker/counsellor in Toronto, Canada. She is trained as a clinical social worker and provides mental health services via her private practice to adults and youths.

Bibi also works as an independent consultant for the Tronto Child Welfare system where her current focus is to improve the experiences of service users. Bibi received training in Anti-Racist Psychotherapy from David Archer, an anti-racist psychotherapist whose focus is Confronting Systemic Racism and Healing Racial Trauma via therapy.

Bib has also worked as a Social Service worker for the City of Toronto for over 30 years delivering services such as Community Development to several areas in Toronto. Bibi has worked extensively with youths on programs such as Training and employment, counselling; Criminal Record Suspension and pardons, Housing, Small Business Pitch it Teams (Self Employment) and, financial literacy.

Bibi is an ally of 2XLGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and oppressed racial groups around the world.





### MARWA AHMED

The Curriculum and Training Specialist at the Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto, for the impactful Opening Doors Project. Being an immigrant with multiple intersecting identities, Marwa directly felt the effects of this on her mental well-being and the factors shaping her overall health. Motivated by this lived experience, she pursued a degree in public health and later earned a graduate degree in health policy and equity.

Throughout her studies, Marwa actively engaged with the community, creating safe spaces to break mental health stigma. She also empowered people from racialized backgrounds, advocating for their rights, and worked closely with service providers to prioritize equity and inclusion through transformative learning. Marwa's dedication brings a fresh perspective to the conference, emphasizing the healing of intergenerational trauma and youth mental health.



### HIBAQ WARSAME

Coordinator for the Youth for Change Program at Midaynta Community Services, a program dedicated to substance use, addictions and mental health and supporting youth. Her work at Midaynta Community Services includes supporting marginalized communities and youth in substance use and addictions education and counseling, pre-employment development, accessing resources like mental health support and financial aid, and working with community partners to enhance their capacity to serve community, youth and their families.

Hibaq has worked with multiple tables including the Chief's Youth Advisory Committee, where she sits with youth across the GTA to address youth concerns in the city and work towards actionable change. She is invested in increasing civic youth engagement and making positive change, focusing on developing youth capacity by encouraging them to make healthy life choices and achieve their goals.

**Panel 3: Barriers in Accessing Civic Spaces for Youth Moderator: Ruweida Hassan**

**Speaker 1 - Nibal Salloum – Human Rights Defender Speaker 3 – Police Constable Megan McGarry**

**Speaker 2 - Abdirahman Nur Mohamed**

**Speaker 4 - Said Sheik-Abdi**



**NIBAL SALLOUM**

Born in Swaida south Syria, graduated from Damascus university art and culture faculty with bachelor in English literature in 2013. Started her activism in 2007 with the Iraqi children refugees in Syria, and worked with several initiatives to support Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. After 2011 Nibal was active with the Syrian civil society, concentrated on: Human rights, LGBTQ+ Rights, Gender equality, and social integration as she believes true peace need a strong human rights bass Worked with several Syrian organizations like Center for civil society and democracy “CCSD”, Dammeh-Hug, International Humanitarian relief and Nuon. In additional to INGOs like Human Rights Watch “HRW”, The Red Umbrella “TRU” Right now, Nibal is a project manager at IMPACT for: Fostering Women Led Space for Change.



**AMBASSADOR ABDIRAHMAN NUR MOHAMED AKA DINARI.**

Born Mogadishu 1961- Background Journalist, Media expert for over 25 years

2001-2004: Former Minister of Commerce

2007 – 2016: Somali Ambassador to Syria and South Sudan

2023- Director of the European and American Department



**NIBAL SALLOUM**

Megan McGarry is a Police Constable with the Toronto Police Service. In her 21 years of service, she has worked in the Public Response Unit, Criminal Investigation Bureau, Youth/Family Violence Unit, Community Response Unit as a School Officer, and the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team. Currently, she is with the Community Partnership and Engagement Unit where she is the Toronto Police Service’s School Board Liaison Officer.



### **SAID SHEIK-ABDI**

Widely recognized international expert and speaker focusing on humanitarian aid, diaspora communities, and partnerships. He has provided advice to governments and communities in several countries. Said has been invited numerous times to the White House and State Department to offer guidance on diaspora, remittances, and humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa. Notably, he was among the few African descendants selected to advise President Obama's first trip to Africa.

Currently, he works at UN Migration/International Organization for Migration as a Senior Regional Strategic Advisor for East and Horn of Africa providing high level support to the Regional Director and missions in building strong partnerships with member states, diaspora and private sector. Said's commitment to humanitarian causes is evident through his involvement in the I AM A STAR campaign, an innovative grassroots platform that rallied the global Somali diaspora and others to support humanitarian aid in Somalia. The campaign's success earned them the prestigious Peter Drucker Award for nonprofit innovation in 2012. Throughout his career, Said has led impactful humanitarian initiatives in US, Somalia, Uganda, Congo, and Bangladesh. He also collaborated with global social media influencers to raise millions of dollars for social good, and supervised disruptive projects, including \$1M of direct aid funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Acknowledging his significant contributions, San Diego State University named Said "Person of the Year" in 2012 for his exceptional work in partnering with the Somali diaspora and other communities. In 2018, the Global Donor Forum Committee in London recognized him as the "2018 Creative Coordinator" alongside Turkish Airlines for their swift response to the drought in Somalia.

#### **Panel 4: Countering Violent Extremist Narratives in Media**

**Moderator: Ahmed Mohdhar**

**Speaker 1 - Lucky Omaar**

**Speaker 3 – Abukar Arman**

**Speaker 2 - Akaash Maharaj**

**Speaker 4 - Dr. Fahad Ahmed**



### **LUCKY OMAAR**

Works with the International Organization for Migration in Somalia in the role of Project Manager for the Women Peace and Security project, which provides gender-responsive rehabilitation and reintegration services to women who disengage from violent extremist groups and strive to become part of peace and recovery efforts. Lucky has worked in Somalia and the East Africa region since 2013. Her professional experience includes rehabilitation and reintegration of disengaged combatants and

associated women, strategic communication, social reintegration, community-based research, economic sector development, and serving as the Communications and Public Relations Advisor to the Prime Minister of Somalia. Lucky's interests include exploring issues of access and development as they relate to vulnerable populations, gender equity, and the impact of conflict on education. Lucky is a Fulbright Scholar and holds a Master's degree in Education, Gender and International Development from the Institute of Education, University College London.



### **AKAASH MAHARAJ**

Ambassador-at-Large for the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC). He represents the international alliance of democratically-elected legislators in its work combatting corruption, strengthening good government, and upholding the rule of law. The United Nations selected him to speak for the world's legislators in the General Assembly Chamber, on bringing kleptocrats to justice. He also serves as a Senior Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs, and as Policy Director for Nature Canada. Earlier in his life, Akaash was an international athlete for Canada, and was a triple gold medalist at the International Championships of Equestrian Skill-at-Arms. He earned his Master of Arts from Oxford University, and was the first overseas student elected President of the student government in the history of the 900-year-old University. He completed further studies at the Sorbonne Université and the United Nations University. His personal web site is [www.Maharaj.org](http://www.Maharaj.org)



### **ABUKAR ARMAN**

Former diplomat and an author- Broken Camel Bells: Somalia's age of terrorism. Abukar has been mentoring youth for more than two decades. He is the Founder/Servant General of Baseerah Transformative Strategies.



### **DR. FAHAD AHMAD**

Dr. Fahad Ahmad is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology at Toronto Metropolitan University and a research affiliate at the Institute of Islamic Studies at University of Toronto. He co-edits a book series titled, Dimensions: Islam, Muslims, and Critical Thought, for University of Toronto Press. Dr. Ahmad is a community engaged scholar whose research intersects structural Islamophobia; the racialized practices of national security; civil society and resistance; and community oriented approaches to philanthropy. His scholarship is informed by 15 years of work experience in community and nonprofit organizations in Canada and the U.S.



## Youth Presentations

**Presentation 1 – Arunita Das - PhD Candidate in Social Legal Studies**

**Presentation 2 – Zenah - Shoot for Peace, Kick Back Connect**

**Presentation 3 – Hamza - Spoken Word Artist**

**Presentation 4 – Samatar Hassan - Midaynta Community Services**



### **ARUNITA DAS – PHD CANDIDATE IN SOCIAL LEGAL STUDIES**

PhD Candidate in the Socio-Legal Studies program at York University. She holds an MA in Socio-Legal Studies and a BA in Sociology. Throughout her graduate studies and work experience with non-profit charitable organizations, Das has been developing research in racism, hate and extremism, colonization, and feminist criminology for over five years. Her current research examines the relationship between online hate speech, hate crime, and free expression laws in Canada.



### **ZENAH - Shoot for Peace, Kickback and Connect**

Zenah is currently a program worker in youth violence prevention at CultureLink Settlement services. She also wears multiple hats within the community. She is an event coordinator for Shoot for Peace, a Program and evaluations coordinator at The Kickback and a director of internal affairs at the Toronto Youth Cabinet.



### **HAMZA - Spoken Word Artist**

Hamza also known as Zuber Jr. is a spoken word artist, a mental health facilitator and an event planner. He is also a facilitator at Our Noor which is a grassroots community organization that provides workshops, mentorship and programming for Black Muslim Youth.



### **MIDAYNTA COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Midaynta Community Services is proud to present a concise overview of its comprehensive range of programs and services. With a steadfast commitment to fostering community well-being and empowerment, Midaynta offers a variety of initiatives designed to address diverse needs and enhance the lives of individuals and families.

# Appendix D: About Midaynta

Midaynta Community Services is a registered Canadian charitable organization that provides settlement, housing, and youth services.

The organization provides meetings, counselling and other support services for refugees, immigrants, and young people across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Midaynta was established in July 1993 as a family reunification project and incorporated in August 1995, as a non-profit organization committed to identifying and responding to the needs of the community. Midaynta offers a wide range of services to fit the needs of the community. These services include immigration, settlement, counseling, case management, housing and homelessness support, as well as educational services such as courses and seminars.

In addition to these services Midaynta offers specialized support through programming such as the Youth Mentorship Program (YMP), Youth Outreach Worker program (YOW), Enhanced Outreach Worker program (EYOW), Student and Family Advocate program and Project Turn-Around. These programs focus on supporting marginalized youth with mental health and connecting youth to resources such as, counseling, employment, navigating the criminal justice system, anger management, gang prevention and intervention services, youth mentorship, stress management, conflict resolution skills, educational services (e.g., sexual health, drug and alcohol addictions, cultural and community) education, internship opportunities and parenting support services.

Midaynta holds annual conferences for the purpose of converging together, sharing knowledge, and devising collaborative efforts. The youth resiliency conferences have paved a pragmatic path to formally and informally engage multiple stakeholders and in process the conference has grown into a powerful platform that the community sees as integral to carry the conversation forward and give the community a voice. In addition, once every month we hold a roundtable meeting at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education to brief each other, share knowledge and collaboratively come up with innovative ways to address radicalization to violence.







# Partners/Funders



Established in 1951, IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people. IOM activities that cut across these areas include the promotion of international migration law, policy debate and guidance, protection of migrants' rights, migration health and the gender dimension of migration.



The University of Toronto Scarborough, also known as U of T Scarborough or UTSC, is one of the three campuses that make up the tri-campus system of the University of Toronto. Located in the Scarborough district, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the campus is set upon suburban parkland next to Highland Creek. It was established in 1964 as Scarborough College, a constituent college of the Faculty of Arts and Science. The college expanded following its designation as an autonomous division of the university in 1972 and gradually became an independent institution. It ranks last in enrolment size among the three University of Toronto campuses, the other two being the St. George campus in Downtown Toronto and the University of Toronto Mississauga.



A non-profit community-based organization that is committed in addressing the immigration, integration, education, health, housing, social service, culture, and economic development needs of Somali Canadians and other immigrants in Canada through programs, service and advocacy. The goal of S.I.A.O is to ensure that all service users, regardless of race, gender, colour, country of origin, or length of residence in Canada have equal access to social services, education, employment, skills training and other relevant programs. We meet the goal by providing individualized programs that are designed to meet the personal goal of the service user. These programs include: Settlement Counselling, Job Placement, English as a Second Language and literacy classes, Advocacy, Information and referral, and interpretation services for clients. Somali Immigrant Aid Organization is dedicated to providing quality and inclusive settlement support services to newcomers.

# Midaynta Community Services

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Satellite Office: Jane Street Hub: 1541 Jane St, North York, ON M9N 2R3

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