

OTTAWA PEOPLE'S COMMISSION

PART II

AFTER THE OCCUPATION: CHANGE



04 APRIL 2023

The Ottawa People's Commission is a grassroots effort to promote healing and justice after the convoy occupation of Ottawa-Gatineau in 2022. OPC is a program of Centretown Community Health Centre.



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Ottawa People's Commission is a program of Centretown Community Health Centre.

This report reflects the opinions of OPC's four independent Commissioners and is not necessarily reflective of the opinions of Centretown Community Health Centre.



Executive Summary

In Part II of its report, entitled **After the Occupation: Change**, the Ottawa People's Commission focuses its attention on the abject absence of leadership by City Hall before, during and in the aftermath of the convoy occupation of February 2022, and sets out a path for the City to earn the community's trust after the trauma and losses suffered by residents, workers and local businesses.

Building on the powerful testimonies and analysis in Part I of its report, released in January 2023, OPC in Part II delves deeper into the themes of occupation, violence, abandonment, and a mobilized community. The report also considers more closely the views of community members who were supporters of the convoy.

Underscoring that the convoy occupation occurred on the already occupied lands of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg, OPC documents those most affected by the crisis. It debunks myths about downtown Ottawa being home to 'fat-cat bureaucrats', showing just how many already vulnerable people — low-income seniors and families, people with disabilities and health challenges, Indigenous and racialized residents, members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, religious minorities, new Canadians, people who are homeless, and others — found themselves under siege. The report concludes the occupation would not have been tolerated had it been staged in a more prosperous part of town, while it details the disturbing impact on the most affected neighbourhoods and the greater Ottawa-Gatineau population.

The report goes on to chronicle the convoy's many forms of violence: the invasion and intimidation; the violence of trucks, horns and fumes; the harassment and assaults; the hatred, racism and discrimination; the menace and fear; the swagger and impunity. It powerfully makes the point that for some, this was the first time they had ever felt unsafe in their own neighbourhood, yet for too many this was merely an escalation of hatred and harassment they experience daily.

Compounding the violence was the knowledge that ill-informed and ill-prepared City officials and police effectively facilitated the siege and then essentially abandoned to lawlessness those who live, work or shop downtown. Enforcement was abandoned. Essential services were suspended. Communication was neglected. Community policing and emergency services disappeared. City Hall hid while the police fumbled their response. And the Province was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile residents suffered — and many continue to suffer. And continue to feel abandoned.

Filling the vacuum, the community rallied to help those most vulnerable access food, medications and essential services. They organized safety walks and mutual aid. They documented threats and human rights violations, and they launched legal action to end the noise torment and seek compensation. As well, they mobilized counter-protests, pressing for action from governments and acting themselves to defend their rights. And they created the Ottawa People's Commission.

Reflecting on this debacle, the four OPC commissioners — human rights advocates Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah, Leilani Farha, Monia Mazigh and Alex Neve — identify four critical factors, each of which constitute a glaring absence, that created and then exacerbated the crisis: the absence of human rights protections, the absence of leadership, the absence of responsiveness, and the absence of dialogue.

Their report is rooted in an analysis of obligations under international **human rights law**, and Canada's constitution, that human rights are guaranteed, and governments have a duty to ensure rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Police bent over backwards to protect convoy supporters' right to protest, in sharp contrast to the recent experience of Indigenous, Black, and other protest organizers locally and elsewhere in the country. But they were unable or unwilling to take action to protect vulnerable residents' rights to live and work free from harm, harassment and hate. Ignoring the rights of some while granting others impunity only happens in the absence of a comprehensive human rights framework that informs policies and practice.

With singular exceptions, **leadership** was sorely lacking in City Hall's response to the convoy occupation. But worse than absent, it was confounded by petty and partisan politics, a culture of buck-passing, and a collapse of effective oversight by City Council and the Ottawa Police Services Board. There are disturbing parallels between the experience of the convoy occupation and that of intimate-partner violence: the gendered power dynamics, the gaslighting of victims, and the complacency and complicity of officials. When you consider too, the disrespect shown Indigenous leaders, the case for new models of leadership and civic engagement is compelling and urgent.

This leadership vacuum further undermined the City's **responsiveness**. Communication was intermittent and off-key. Telling people who live downtown to 'avoid downtown' was as vexing as describing the occupation as 'mainly peaceful'. There was a lack of clarity and transparency about enforcement of laws and bylaws. There was no concerted effort to monitor or respond to community needs. Nor was there effective support or protection for community partners struggling to meet the surge in demand. Unlike the City's response to other emergencies, protocols and best practice were ignored. The contrast is stark and telling.

Aggravating each of these dynamics is the volatile and toxic mix of hate, extremism and white supremacy espoused by some convoy organizers, that was given oxygen during the occupation and has been emboldened since. Doxing and death threats, populism and polarization threaten civic participation and democracy. Yet this dimension of the convoy occupation has received scant attention, and the corrosive impact of hate has gone largely unacknowledged by government or the various official reviews of the convoy. Concerted action to promote **dialogue** and build support for equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility is urgently needed.

Given this analysis, OPC makes recommendations under **eight calls for action**; some are immediate and concrete, others more systemic and complex. Most are directed to the City, though some involve the provincial and federal governments. Many, importantly, point to the vital need for the three orders of government to put aside jurisdictional jealousies and coordinate their efforts in upholding human rights.

Taken together they are transformational and would offer Ottawa residents and businesses great assurance that lessons have been learned and the debacle of the convoy occupation will not be repeated.

EARN TRUST

Ottawans have lost confidence in City Hall. To earn their trust, the City must convene town halls to hear directly from residents, provide meaningful apologies, redress harms and take concrete action to build credibility and collaboration.

UPHOLD INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The City and Province must commit to adopting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to respecting Indigenous leadership in times of crisis. Community groups too, have a role in advancing reconciliation.

PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

The City must adopt a Human Rights Charter and develop a Human Rights Action Plan with targets, resources and enforcement mechanisms. As well, the Province must strengthen human rights protections, and all levels of government must act to protect journalists.

PRIORITIZE SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

The City needs to develop a city-wide 'needs map' and crisis outreach plans to ensure access to essential services.

KEEP THE COMMUNITY SAFE

The City needs to develop a policy on protest and community safety, strengthen police oversight, launch an independent investigation into the failure to protect residents, and reduce or reallocate police budgets to increase funding for community safety and well-being.

STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The City should create an Emergency Advisory Committee, strengthen its Emergency Management Program, and coordinate emergency response across all orders of government.

ADDRESS HATE, BUILD COMMUNITY AND ADVANCE INCLUSION

All orders of government should collaborate to confront hate, implementing a comprehensive plan of action. Efforts to increase diversity among senior municipal officials must be redoubled and support for community initiatives promoting community well-being increased. And spaces for dialogue and community building should be supported.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABLE FOLLOW-UP

All orders of government should consult publicly on their plans to implement recommendations arising from the different inquiries and reviews linked to the convoy occupation, including OPC, and report regularly on progress and outcomes.

OPC provides a timeline for implementation of these recommendations, with some to be accomplished by June 2023 and all to be accomplished by June 2024.

Introduction

In Part I of our final report, based on the testimony, comments and submissions we received from over 200 Ottawa residents and organizations impacted by the February 2022 convoy, the Ottawa People's Commission on the Convoy Occupation pointed to four overarching themes that capture the essence of that experience: occupation, violence, abandonment and community mobilization. We noted as well that a minority of Ottawa residents felt the convoy's impact had been positive.

We concluded that the failure to keep communities in central Ottawa safe during the convoy occupation revealed an overarching failure of human rights that goes much deeper and wider than oversights, mistakes and bad decisions that were made during those three-and-a-half weeks last February.

In Part II, we consider what we heard across those four themes more closely, identifying common themes that emerge, and assessing the consequences and impact of the harms people experienced. We reflect further on what we heard from local residents who supported the convoy.

We have now also had the opportunity to examine the findings from the report of the Public Order Emergency Commission, and the audits of the responses of the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Police Service and the Ottawa Police Services Board to the convoy protests that were conducted by the Auditor General of the City of Ottawa.

On that basis we have reached conclusions and we offer recommendations that relate to four findings.

- There is an evident need to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated **human rights framework**, not only for downtown but for the entire city of Ottawa, drawing together the municipal, provincial and federal governments.
- This is a vital moment to pursue new models and advance cultural change with respect to **leadership and civic engagement** in the City.
- There must be operational improvements to ensure greater **responsiveness** to crises of this nature in Ottawa.
- In a time of deepening polarization in society, innovative approaches to **dialogue and community building** should be explored, to provide constructive, open spaces for conversations about contentious and divisive issues.

BEFORE ALL ELSE, THESE ARE INDIGENOUS LANDS

Central to understanding the problematic nature of both the convoy occupation itself, and the notably deficient response of governments and police forces to the convoy's impact on the people of Ottawa, is the recognition that these events transpired on the unceded and unsurrendered lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. As we noted in Part I, this was an occupation that took place in already occupied lands.

Yet it is abundantly clear that the role and the authority of local First Nations leadership were not understood or respected at any point in the lead up to, during, or in the aftermath of this crisis. Indigenous protocols and sacred ceremonies were both disregarded and appropriated. Messages and slogans, such as “Every Child Matters,” connected to vital Indigenous rights struggles were misused and misrepresented. Indigenous leaders and elders were not meaningfully consulted about the nature of the convoy, its impact on Indigenous communities and appropriate responses to it.

We have heard these concerns repeatedly in consultative meetings, testimony at hearings and in written submissions, from Indigenous elders, leaders, activists and organizations. While these failures and examples of disrespect are perhaps most glaring on the part of convoy organizers and participants, it was also characteristic of government and police attitudes and tactics.

The OPC embraces the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Parliament recognizes to be a “universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law.” The Declaration is foundational to how we have assessed the convoy’s impact and shaped recommendations for the way forward. At all times, recognition that Ottawa is situated on the lands of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people must guide and determine how demonstrations proceed, policing and law enforcement is undertaken, and human rights are upheld in the city.

THE NATURE OF THE CONVOY

In Part I we made a number of findings about the nature of the convoy itself, including that it amounted to an occupation of the downtown core of the city, and that its activities and impact were undeniably characterized by violence and other human rights abuses. That disturbing reality provides a cautionary message that extends beyond a limited analysis of what happened in February 2022.

Clearly many of the people who were involved in organizing or participating in the convoy did so because of disagreement with COVID-related public health measures. Others felt a wider sense of discontent with a range of government laws and decisions, and with political institutions in the country in general. Their messages were largely directed at the federal government, and Prime Minister Trudeau personally, even though many of their disagreements relate to matters that fall within provincial or municipal jurisdiction. Unpopular or not, well informed or not, there is certainly a right to hold such views and to express them publicly.

What very rightly and understandably caused such distress and fear for residents of Ottawa, however, was the more sinister and chilling side to the convoy. That included the many ways in which unbridled hate – expressed through racist, anti-Indigenous, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, and ableist banners, flags, posters, taunts and threats – marked many of their encounters with convoy participants, on the streets and online. Insistence that such views were apparently not shared or endorsed by convoy organizers and represented a minority view are an unsatisfactory response given how prevalent these concerns were and how little was done to counter any such views. Dismissing visible and ever-present hate as the actions of a few isolated, rogue convoy participants simply does not reflect what residents experienced and witnessed on a daily basis throughout the convoy occupation.

The distress and fear were exacerbated by the many ways that violent and harmful activities, such as the incessant blaring of truck horns at excruciating decibel levels, were intentionally promoted and tolerated. They were further stoked by an unshakeable sense of dread. People felt that something catastrophic might easily occur, with the combination of unrestricted open fires, propane tanks and fuel-laden trucks; and the constant worry and uncertainty about how violent the protests might become, including if weapons were stored in any of the vehicles and whether there might be a forceful takeover of Parliament, government offices or any other buildings downtown.

The Public Order Emergency Commission (POEC) analyzes the origins of the “Freedom convoy movement” and situates it within the “emergence of a new wave of populist sentiment” around the world, including in Canada, over the past decade. The POEC describes there being “at least three broad trends that help to describe the emergence of this sentiment: economic marginalization, social anxiety, and distrust in political institutions.”¹ The experience of the convoy occupation at community level makes it clear to us that a further, deeply concerning element at the root of what happened, is the unchecked, spiralling promotion and tolerance of hate in Canadian society, rooted in white supremacy and often tinged with a foreboding sense of imminent violence.

It is our view that this dimension of the convoy experience, while certainly decried by various political leaders (forcefully so by some politicians at the time, notably former Ottawa downtown councillor Catherine McKenney) and, to a limited degree, by some police, and examined in some media coverage (more extensively in alternative than in mainstream outlets), has largely been dismissed as a footnote to rather than a central component of the convoy’s very nature. This is deeply problematic because it overlooks one of the most obvious reasons that the convoy occupation was so traumatizing, and why its legacy remains so upsetting; the troubling realization for residents and businesses in downtown Ottawa that hate, with an inclination to violence, had arrived in their neighbourhoods and that officials had essentially welcomed it in.

A WORD ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Much of the analysis in this report is grounded in human rights. That arises in two broad senses: rights related to the protest activities of convoy participants, and rights associated with the safety and well-being of members of the community.

Those two sets of rights are often described and perceived, wrongly in our view, as being in tension and even conflicting with each other, leading inevitably to explicit or implicit choices on the part of authorities to prioritize the protection of some rights, to the detriment of others.

The People’s Commission takes as a starting point the clear international recognition that all human rights are “universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated,” as governments affirmed in the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights². It is not a matter that protest rights are paramount such that residents of surrounding communities should be expected to bear any and all resulting harms. Neither is it the case that neighbourhoods and businesses should be free from inconvenience and disruption such that protests become muted and, effectively, inconsequential. A human rights approach puts all rights on equal footing and maximizes their collective respect and protection.

We analyze the need for a human rights framework in Ottawa in greater detail later in this report. But we make this initial observation here, about the place of human rights in understanding the convoy’s impact, in response to two concerns we have heard frequently.

The first, noted by many people who testified and made submissions to OPC, often drawing on their own personal experiences, points to a failure to uphold human rights universally. There is both a reality and perception of double standards when it comes to the policing of protests in Canada. Many people referred to other protests, in Ottawa or elsewhere in the country, which have been much less disruptive and posed far less inconvenience or harm to people in surrounding communities who were not taking part in the protest, but were met with a more immediate and forceful police response than was the case with the convoy occupation.

¹ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 1, p. 28.

² *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, World Conference on Human Rights, 25 June, 1993, para. 5, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/vienna.pdf>.

Notably, many of those other protests involve Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, environmental groups and homeless encampments, whereas the participants in the convoy occupation were overwhelmingly white males. This inevitably leads to concerns that the right of some people and communities to engage in protest is respected more than the right of others to do so; and also that the rights of some people and communities, impacted by disruptive and even harmful protest activities, are more likely to be protected than is the case for other people and communities. Double standards and inconsistencies of this nature, giving rise to concerns about racism and discrimination, undermine the universality of human rights.

The second concern highlights a failure to understand the indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of human rights. Some convoy supporters who testified before the People's Commission asserted that raising concerns about the nature and impact of the convoy is to deny the importance of the right to protest. They note that Ottawa is the nation's capital, downtown Ottawa is where Parliament is located, raucous protest is to be expected, and the consequences of that should be anticipated and tolerated, seemingly without limit, by residents and businesses.

We wholeheartedly agree that protest rights – protected in both international and Canadian law through the fundamental freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly – are essential and must be championed vigorously, particularly at a time when governments around the world, including in Canada, increasingly repress and even criminalize protest activities.

It was striking to us how often we heard that very point from downtown residents who raised concerns about the convoy's impact while also pointing out that they themselves regularly take part in and even organize protests on Parliament Hill. We do not take their concerns about the convoy's impact as negating in any way the vital importance of the

right to protest. Protest, including loud and even confrontational protest, does happen frequently in and around Parliament, government buildings and embassies in central Ottawa, as it absolutely should.

The crucial right to engage in protest should and can, however, be upheld in a manner that respects the ways that protest rights are indivisible from, and interdependent and interrelated with, such other human rights as the rights to health, housing, food, freedom of movement, security of the person, an adequate livelihood and standard of living, and equality and non-discrimination. A human rights framework provides that comprehensive approach.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY

To understand the impact of the convoy and, in particular, to understand the human rights realities and needs that should have been anticipated and the human right harms that should have been addressed, it is essential to understand who makes up the communities that were occupied.

Geographically there are several ways to do so, though geographic boundaries on their own do not provide the crucial demographic information that is essential to assessing human rights impact. Throughout the three-and-a-half weeks of the convoy occupation there were many references to the "red zone", an area bounded by Elgin, Bay and Wellington Streets and a southern limit that shifted from Slater Street to several blocks beyond, as the dynamics of the occupation and location of trucks evolved. There was also a slightly larger, three square kilometre "secure area" bounded by Bronson Avenue, the Rideau Canal, Highway 417 and Wellington Street. Outside of this area, generally known as Centretown, the Byward Market and communities in the Lowertown, Vanier and Overbrook neighbourhoods were also directly impacted. The People's Commission heard from residents and business owners from all of those neighbourhoods.

The population of these four neighbourhoods in central Ottawa is considerable. Approximately 31,100³ people live in Centretown alone. When the other three neighbourhoods are added, the figure rises to 100,000 people, equivalent to the population of a small city.

There are a number of misconceptions about the make-up of these communities. Many people assume that a relatively small number of people live in central Ottawa and that the downtown is primarily composed of government and other office buildings. Another misplaced assumption is that those who do live downtown are primarily politicians, civil servants and diplomats, who are comfortably middle class and upper middle class, and reside principally in high-priced condominiums. That is not the case.

The neighbourhoods most affected by the convoy occupation are home to a higher than average number of low income families, low income seniors, and people with disabilities. More than one in three are from racialized communities, with large Indigenous, Black, Asian and Latino communities. As well, there's a high proportion of residents who are part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. More than two-thirds are renters.⁴

As we note in our conclusions, the People's Commission is concerned that governments and police forces failed to take account of this critical demographic information about the identities and composition of the communities that bore the brunt of the convoy's impact. As such, it comes as little surprise and is almost inevitable, that decisions taken by authorities failed to address human rights needs, particularly of the most vulnerable residents of these communities and, in so doing, often exacerbated human rights abuses.

OUR METHODOLOGY

The People's Commission's mandate is focused on the community impact of the convoy occupation. Consequently, there are many issues which, while connected to the convoy, are beyond our focus. That includes such questions as whether the use of the Emergencies Act was justified, what the future of Wellington Street should be, and the validity of vaccine mandates and masking protocols. Many people expressed views about those issues in testimony or submissions which may be referenced in our report but about which we do not make specific findings or reach conclusions.

There are also limitations inherent in the fact that we are popularly convened, without legal powers to subpoena witnesses or compel disclosure of documents. That means we are not always able to reach final conclusions about the specific reasons behind particular policies set by government or actions launched by police, the consequences of which were nonetheless felt widely in the community and featured prominently in testimony and submissions received. We have in some instances had exchanges or meetings with officials or carried out additional research, to elicit further information that complements or completes what we have heard from community members.

None of those qualifications should be seen as limitations; rather they underscore the unique nature and strength of OPC's process. By focusing on the experience and impact at community level we reflect a perspective that has not been central to official reviews, a perspective that should however be at the fore of understanding what happened and what went wrong during the convoy occupation, and what needs to change going forward.

³ Statistics Canada, *2021 Census of Population*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001, prepared by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2023.

⁴ For more detailed demographic information, see Appendix D.

It has been evident to us that there is considerable value in providing a safe and constructive space for open discussion of difficult issues and, for many people, traumatic experiences. In fact, in our conclusions and recommendations dealing with dialogue and community building, we note that there might possibly have been benefit to having such venues available during the COVID-19 pandemic, touching on issues that were generally not constructively discussed across society and which became toxically divisive and polarizing, leading, to some degree, to the convoy itself.

The Convoy's Impact

WHAT IS IT TO BE OCCUPIED?

In Part I of our report, the People's Commission concluded that the experience of the convoy for residents and businesses in downtown Ottawa was indeed an occupation.

We noted that the term occupation carries strong connotations for Indigenous peoples in Canada, whose lands have been occupied for centuries, as well as for peoples in other parts of the world who live under occupation, sometimes for decades, at the hands of an invading military force. We do not use the term to in any way equate the Ottawa experience to those situations, nor do we use it in a manner that trivializes the gravity of those other circumstances.

The simple truth is that there is no term, other than occupation, that more aptly describes the experience. Neighbourhoods were overrun by an outside force that felt akin to an invasion for people living and working there. They blockaded streets and made neighbourhoods largely impassable. Given how this force took over and exerted control, both physically and psychologically, normal business operations, transportation, community programs and services, and social activities had little choice but to shut down or significantly scale back. People were left feeling under siege. The presence of this outside force continued despite opposition from the surrounding communities and, until the invocation of the Emergencies Act, it appeared their presence would continue

indefinitely. People experienced human rights abuses at the hands of this force, and worried there could readily be more violence. They observed operations to refuel and provision this outside force with what appeared akin to military logistical planning and precision.

By any measure, it was an occupation. Beyond those overarching observations, there are aspects of the experience of occupation that emerged during the course of our hearings and consultations, as well as in written submissions, that are important to highlight.

THE OCCUPATION OF OCCUPIED LANDS

The neighbourhoods in central Ottawa that were occupied by the convoy, right up to Parliament itself, are all situated on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people, lands that have never been ceded or surrendered by treaty or other means. They are, therefore, lands that are already occupied and have been for a long time. The consequences of the dispossession and human rights violations associated with the occupation of Indigenous lands across Canada is a matter of urgent national concern, one of the most significant challenges the country – very much including the National Capital Region – faces.

Convoy organizers and participants showed no regard for that fundamental reality. There was no respect shown to local First Nations elders and leaders. There was no meaningful outreach, let alone consultation. There was no effort to

understand, respect and follow local First Nations protocols. A number of convoy participants who were Indigenous, both from the local area and other parts of the country, as well as other individuals who asserted that they were Indigenous, carried out drumming, lit sacred fires and conducted other ceremonies in places or in circumstances that did not accord with the ways of local First Nations. Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples living in central Ottawa experienced violence and human rights abuses, and denigration of their traditions, and witnessed the appropriation of ceremony and of cherished mantras such as 'Every Child Matters'

In many respects this is the most foundational indictment to be made of the convoy occupation. For Indigenous Peoples, this occupation only exacerbated a long-established occupation.

WHERE, WHAT AND WHO WAS OCCUPIED?

Perhaps understandably and certainly not surprisingly, the general public does not have a clear sense as to just who lives in the neighbourhoods that were impacted by the convoy occupation. People hear references to central Ottawa and assume those neighbourhoods are dominated by Parliament, government buildings, diplomatic missions and other offices. And while that is certainly true, it overlooks the fact these neighbourhoods are home to tens of thousands of residents, with vibrant business and entertainment districts as well.

Residents made it clear to us that they felt as if there was little awareness of or concern about the reality that downtown Ottawa was home for them, and the convoy occupation had turned their daily lives inside out. Instead, they listened with disbelief to police statements urging people simply to avoid coming downtown, as if that was an option for them. And they watched as police overwhelmingly focused their attention and resources on Wellington Street, with much less regard for the devastating impacts being felt in the occupied residential neighbourhoods that lie beyond Parliament.

Of course, the official response to the convoy occupation had to be cognizant of the possibility that there might have been an attempt to occupy Parliament itself. The spectre of the January 6, 2021 invasion of the US Capitol was very much front and centre. But the at-times singular preoccupation with that possibility came at the expense of recognizing and responding to where the convoy occupation's violence and harms were actually felt most acutely.

VULNERABILITIES DISREGARDED

Not only is there an underappreciation for how many people live in and operate small businesses in the occupied areas of central Ottawa, there is equally little understanding of just who lives in those neighbourhoods and the vulnerabilities faced by many residents. Some may think downtown residents are primarily politicians and government workers living in high-end condominiums. That is clearly not the case, as was evident from the wide ranging backgrounds and identities of the people we heard from who call downtown Ottawa home.⁵

OPC heard from people with disabilities, and elderly people with mobility restrictions and pressing health care needs. We heard from people who are homeless and from street-involved youth. We heard from a significant number of people who live on limited and fixed incomes, are precariously employed or who depend on social assistance, for whom meeting monthly rent payments and the reality of food insecurity are constant worries. We heard from people living with autism, and coping with mental health challenges. We heard from Indigenous people, and people from racialized communities, from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and from the Jewish and Muslim communities; all of whom have faced and continue to face discrimination, before, during and after the convoy occupation. We heard from students enrolled in nearby universities as well as people working virtually due to COVID, for whom quiet and uninterrupted home offices and study space are crucial. We heard from parents of young children.

⁵ For more detailed demographic information, see Appendix D.

We heard from people who rely on public transit and the ability to shop locally, not just as a convenience but as integral to meeting their basic needs.

Very significantly, we heard from people who were concerned about COVID-19, especially given the increased rates associated with the Omicron variant at the time. We heard from many people who face heightened vulnerability to COVID because they are immuno-compromised, or are conscious of family members who are at greater risk of contracting the virus. Consequently, we heard from a substantial number of people who take the public health advice about vaccines and masks very seriously. Many told us they were diligent about masking in public places at the time of the convoy occupation, including while walking to a nearby grocery store or pharmacy. That simple act frequently attracted attention from convoy participants occupying their neighbourhood who would taunt or belittle them for wearing masks and in some instances assault them as they attempted to rip the mask from their face.

THE OCCUPATION WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN TOLERATED ELSEWHERE

There is no definitive answer to a question that came up in many presentations and submissions we heard and received: would this have been tolerated elsewhere? If the convoy had occupied and made life intolerable in higher income residential neighbourhoods in the city, such as Rockcliffe, New Edinburgh, the Glebe, Old Ottawa South or Westboro, would it have been allowed to so quickly become entrenched, cause such harm and wreak such havoc for residents and local businesses, and remain in place as long as it did?

There may be a temptation to conclude the question is pointless as the attraction of the downtown communities was clearly tied to the presence of Parliament, which is not the case in those other neighbourhoods. But that is not entirely so. Early on, trucks were parking on the Queen Elizabeth Driveway, extending further south along that roadway into the Glebe. That was quickly shut down and concrete barriers installed to keep the trucks out.

There is little doubt downtown residents and businesses very understandably and legitimately feel the answer to that question is that a similar occupation would simply never have been allowed to take hold in most other neighbourhoods in the city; a distinction largely tied to property values, income levels and political clout.

If this had taken place in other neighbourhoods there is little doubt that more would have been done to prevent it becoming entrenched at the outset. It would have been policed and shut down more forcefully and more quickly. And the communities impacted would not have been gaslighted with commentary dismissing the violence they were experiencing as “mainly peaceful” or, at worse, mere inconveniences and nuisances to be expected when protests take place.

THE IMPACT OF THE OCCUPATION

We consider human rights abuses and other harms in the next section, reviewing the violent nature of the activities and conduct associated with the convoy. It is important, however, to note that the disruptive, blockading nature of the occupation in and of itself, had a devastating impact on the community.

Most obviously, freedom of movement was dramatically impaired. Of greatest concern is the fact transit services were canceled or significantly cut back. Most significantly that included Para Transpo, an essential service for people with disabilities, the elderly and people with other mobility restrictions, who are disproportionately represented in the neighbourhoods most affected by the convoy occupation. As a result, many were unable to leave their homes to access medical appointments or essential services.

Many people described being unable to exit their driveways or the parking garages or lots at their apartment or condominium buildings, or only being able to do so by driving on sidewalks. We also heard from people who were unable to access car share services during the occupation.

Transportation is essential for so many different personal reasons. We were particularly struck by how disruptive and onerous the impact was for people needing to go to medical and even surgery appointments. One individual shared what he went through having to leave and later return to his downtown apartment for cancer surgery at a local hospital. The Uber drivers he depended on could not make it any closer than 10 blocks from where he lived. As a result, he had to walk the final distance at a time when his health situation was extremely vulnerable.

The restrictions were not just about getting around by bus or car. People's ability to navigate their neighbourhoods on foot, and by wheelchairs and motorized and other mobility aids, was also substantially curtailed. Along some streets, sidewalks and intersections had become virtually impassable, clogged by vehicles but also more treacherous because winter snow and ice could not be cleared.

In many circumstances the prospect of traveling even two or three blocks to reach a nearby grocery store was terrifying for people who feared being accosted, taunted, threatened and even assaulted, because they had experienced abuse personally or had heard of it from neighbours and friends.

The People's Commission heard from significant numbers of people who essentially became imprisoned in their homes, because they were unable or too fearful to leave. We also heard from people who felt compelled to vacate their homes when the situation became intolerable. That was only possible if they had friends or relatives in other parts of the city who could take them in, or the resources to travel outside the city or even to rent accommodation elsewhere.

It is important to note this was not only a matter of people not being able to get out of downtown. It also meant friends and family were often not able or were restricted in coming to visit them, especially if they were reliant on public transit or knew there

would be nowhere to park. At later stages there was also the risk they would be turned back at police checkpoints controlling entry into the red zone, a particular concern for racialized persons. This also posed challenges for delivery companies trying to reach addresses downtown. All of that limited the degree to which downtown residents could receive assistance, including personal care and deliveries of food, oxygen and medication from outside their occupied neighbourhood.

The impact on businesses was devastating, as most felt forced to shut down either because they could not receive supplies, customers could not reach them, or they were concerned about the safety of staff and clientele. This came on the heels of enormous financial challenges during COVID-related shutdowns over the two previous years. The Rideau Centre closed completely for the duration of the occupation; an unprecedented decision. One estimate is that the business losses associated with the convoy amount to \$150 million to \$210 million.⁶

In some cases, employees were paid even while the business was closed, but that was not true for most. Many lost hours, wages and tips. At best, out-of-work employees were only able to obtain a limited amount of Employment Insurance benefits, because of the waiting period before they were eligible to apply.

WIDER IMPACT

While the most glaring impact of the occupation was in the Centretown streets leading up to and near Parliament, which were gridlocked with hundreds of parked rigs and other vehicles, the impact was felt far beyond that area.

Convoy vehicles and protesters were present in significant numbers throughout the Byward Market and Lowertown. Staff at the Shepherds of Good Hope homeless mission were accosted and threatened by convoy participants who demanded they provide them with meals. The Vanier and Overbrook neighbourhoods contended with the

⁶ Affidavit of Larry Andrade sworn February 25, 2022, *Table 1 - Summary of Preliminary Estimate of Damages*, Champ & Associates.

presence of the Coventry Road staging site, and the "Bikers' Church", both of which attracted significant numbers of convoy vehicles and participants.

Residents living near the Coventry Road site described how disruptive that was and how threatened they felt by the activities there, concerned that it appeared to have become a major depot for propane and fuel supplies. An Indigenous violence-against-women centre, located nearby, was forced to close.

In fact, we heard about impact felt across the city. Some residents on streets that became thoroughfares for convoy vehicles exiting Highway 417 and heading downtown, spoke of the sleeplessness they experienced as trucks blared their horns incessantly and at all hours to announce their arrival in the city. Gatineau residents, who both work in and rely on Ottawa hospitals, could not easily reach those destinations. Young racialized workers, living in suburban neighbourhoods but employed at the Rideau Centre and elsewhere downtown, lost wages. Cleaners and other shift workers, many of them immigrant and racialized women, were fearful as they navigated downtown streets at night. People living in other parts of the city but who make use of programs run by social services agencies located downtown were no longer able to access those services. We heard that, for instance, from women who rely on daily support, including meals, from The Well, and from senior citizens who depend on programs offered by Good Companions.

The Convoy's Impact

THE CONVOY'S MANY FORMS OF VIOLENCE

In Part I of our report, the People's Commission concluded the community experience makes it clear that the conduct of convoy participants and, in many respects, the very nature of the convoy occupation itself, puts the lie to any assertion that it was a peaceful or "mainly peaceful" event. We concluded, instead, that the convoy occupation was marked by violence, in many forms.

Residents and business owners were perplexed, and many felt gaslighted, by early police comments, including from former Ottawa Police Service chief Peter Sloly, indicating that the convoy protests were "mainly peaceful" and had not "evolved into a violent situation".⁷ That narrative gained traction in many corners and held, even as the occupation's impact on the community became more disruptive and harmful.

Residents and business owners described to us that they felt the focus of police attention, and thus the assessment of its violent or peaceful nature, was almost entirely on the area of Wellington Street immediately in front of Parliament. It seemed to them that as long as there were no physical altercations, attacks and injuries there, and no attempt by convoy participants to mount a

forcible infiltration or invasion of Parliament or of government buildings, the convoy was considered by many police and other officials not to be violent. Meanwhile, life was very different, and decidedly violent, in the streets and neighbourhoods away from Parliament Hill.

Very significantly, the concerning actions associated with convoy participants are not only violent, unlawful or criminal, they also constitute human rights abuses. Such crucial human rights as the rights to equality and to be protected from discrimination, freedom of movement, security of the person, prohibitions against torture and cruel treatment, and rights to adequate housing, physical and mental health, food security, education, an adequate standard of living, and to work and gain a living were directly and indirectly abused and undermined by the convoy organizers and participants in many ways, both blatantly and insidiously.

A VIOLENT TAKEOVER

The violence began with the convoy's arrival in and, essentially, invasion of central Ottawa. A staggering number of vehicles, ranging from massive big-rig trucks to pick-ups, flooded into the city and very quickly claimed and took over a number of downtown streets through the force of

⁷ CBC News, *Ottawa police chief lauds protest response despite criticism*, 1 February, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ottawa-protest-convoy-police-response-1.6334125>; CBC News, *Ottawa mayor would like protesters to move on, but organizers say they're not going anywhere*, 30 January, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truck-convoy-protests-sunday-1.6332893>.

their overwhelming numbers and the size of many of the vehicles. Residents have described to us their feelings of disbelief, intimidation, fear and outrage as their neighbourhoods were occupied against their will. Almost immediately they realized that their freedom of movement had been dramatically curtailed.

We heard repeatedly that the impact of this violent takeover was most serious for people living with disabilities, the elderly and people with healthcare and other pre-existing mobility restrictions. We heard from many people who felt confined, trapped and isolated, and who were terrified at the realization that if they faced a medical or other personal emergency, it would be very difficult for anyone to reach them.

THE VIOLENCE OF TRUCKS, HORNS AND FUMES

In many ways, the trucks that were the defining feature of this convoy represented and were themselves a source and certainly a symbol of violence for residents. Many people described to us that the mere presence of massive, fuel-laden trucks outside their homes felt violent. People didn't know and anxiously wondered what was inside them. They agonized that the trucks could either deliberately or unintentionally be used as or become a weapon, by driving into people or buildings, or by exploding accidentally if ignited by an open fire, barbecue or fireworks. Three residents provided testimony of incidents in which trucks were in fact used to attack or threaten them. One person was struck and pushed by a truck; another narrowly missed being hit by an accelerating truck which clearly intended to frighten them.

Trucks were used in ways that were painful and unhealthy for many residents. Incessant blaring of truck horns, at decibel levels that can and do lead to hearing impairment and loss, caused residents intense physical pain and excruciating psychological

torment, and made many normal activities such as online work calls and classes impossible because of the extreme noise. Expert reports prepared in conjunction with a civil lawsuit mounted by a group of residents and which resulted in an injunction against the honking, documented decibel levels as high as 121.

UN human rights experts recognize that loud noises can be and are used in ways that amount to both physical and psychological torture.⁸ Residents described to us how painful, agonizing and disruptive the horns were for them. Many took extreme steps in response, including confining themselves to inner rooms, washrooms, and even closets in their apartments in an attempt to muffle the noise. Some with the means purchased or made use of noise-cancelling headphones. Many people who spoke of the convoy occupation experience having provoked mental health crises that included anxiety, depression and attempted suicide, highlighted that the horns were a major contributing factor.

We also heard from many residents about the impact of truck engines idling just outside their homes, with noxious diesel fumes from the larger trucks in particular seeping through windows and permeating apartment and condominium lobbies. Given the extreme cold during the convoy occupation, trucks were left running at all hours, including overnight, to keep participants – many of whom were sleeping in their trucks, sometimes with young children – warm. The smell and even taste of the fumes was unpleasant for anyone who had to endure it, but the health impact on people with disabilities who may face breathing challenges, and people with asthma and other respiratory conditions, was debilitating. Residents were forced to block the bottom of their doors, and cover windows with blankets, drapes and other materials, in an attempt to keep out the fumes. Many had to use or increase dosages of medications to treat their breathing-related ailments.

⁸ Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, *Psychological Torture*, UN Document A/HRC/43/49, 20 March, 2020, paras. 26 and 55, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/070/73/PDF/G2007073.pdf?OpenElement>.

VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS AND ASSAULTS

Many residents experienced direct acts of violence on the streets in their communities, at the hands of convoy participants; violent encounters and assaults that infringed their right to security of the person. We heard numerous descriptions of such incidents.

Many people were surrounded, accosted, and pushed and shoved violently by convoy participants, often accompanied by taunts because the person was wearing a mask. We heard from several people about physical assaults in which convoy participants violently removed masks from their faces or attempted to do so.

One resident who lives with a disability that restricts his mobility, described a troubling assault during which a convoy participant took control of his wheelchair and lunged it around dangerously, including coming close to pushing him into traffic. Women and gender-diverse pedestrians, and sex workers, felt especially vulnerable to harassment, including sexual harassment, from emboldened, and sometimes drunken, convoy participants.

One group that was singled out and targeted for threats, violent intimidation, and physical assaults were journalists reporting about the convoy. Particularly vulnerable to aggressive harassment and attacks were women, Indigenous and racialized journalists. Media outlets arranged for security guards to accompany journalists while they were reporting. One seasoned journalist told us he has never had to do that before when reporting in Canada.

VIOLENT HATE, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Residents were deeply upset and traumatized by the many ways they experienced, overheard or witnessed expressions of hate, racism and discrimination by convoy participants. It is clear to us that the impact of that racism, misogyny,

homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other hate and discrimination, was inherently violent.

Many people saw or were aware of reports that Nazi, Confederate and other racist flags were displayed by some convoy participants. Jewish and Black residents were clear that seeing such flags or even knowing they have been seen by others triggers feelings of panic and fear, and is akin to a violent attack. Several people described having pride posters and flags defaced or ripped down from their homes and businesses. Others told us about being subjected to racist taunts and slurs while walking in their own neighbourhood. Flags and paraphernalia associated with far-right militia and white supremacist groups added to the tension. The Islamic Care Centre was vandalized after three years without incident. Their prayer service and Halal meal distribution to unhoused people was suspended due to fear and lack of protection. One downtown resident who lives with autism, spoke of the impact of a sign warning people not to get COVID vaccines as it would cause autism in their children. They described seeing that sign as making them feel that they did not deserve to live.

We heard from many downtown residents who are from vulnerable communities. They are well acquainted with hate, racism and discrimination. They felt that the tone of much of the convoy occupation was imbued with a sense of intolerance for individuals and communities who differed from the convoy participants, who were predominantly white, heterosexual men. That was clear from the toxic online posts associated with some of the groups supporting the convoy, as well as some of the organizers and participants. That was clear from the presence of and tolerance for hateful and racist flags, banners and posters. And that was explicitly clear from hateful and racist comments made directly to many residents.

For residents and business owners who are racialized, Indigenous, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, living with disabilities, Jewish, Muslim, who identify as women, or who have other diverse and often intersecting identities, that was not just insulting and offensive, it was painful and degrading violence. It is violence they have experienced before, violence that is rooted in systemic racism and discrimination they contend with on a daily basis. Many people emphasized, therefore, that the impact of the convoy's violence was all the greater because it compounded and amplified that existing reality.

Notably, this time the violence was experienced as well by people who have not faced it before, who have enjoyed safety and privilege in society and not confronted hate or intolerance in their own lives. Residents described what an eye-opening and shocking experience it was for them to realize what hate feels like first hand.

Whether this was a new experience or reflective of an ongoing reality, this time the violence was felt particularly acutely because it was occurring so close to home, which should and needs to be a safe place. As such, it led many residents to decide that it was too dangerous to go outside, adding to their feeling of being trapped and imprisoned. For those living in the streets, that fear pushed them further into the shadows.

For some residents, the oppressive impact of the expressions and climate of violent hate led to thoughts of self-harm and suicide. We received reports of at least one young person living in downtown Ottawa who tragically did end their life during the first week of the convoy occupation.

VIOLENCE SPREADS

As the convoy occupation deepened and continued, the violence, along with threats and rumours of further violence, spread rapidly. Schools in central Ottawa, including primary schools, were targeted

for intimidating drive-bys of vehicles. Fuel cans were stored adjacent to Lisgar Collegiate Institute, a downtown high school. A Saturday morning COVID vaccination clinic for approximately sixty children, organized by the Centretown Community Health Centre, had to contend with the menacing presence of open fires, propane tanks and a number of convoy participants drinking beer immediately in front of their building. There was a bomb threat at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Dozens of trucks slowly circulated along the roadways at the Ottawa airport. At one point a flood of phone calls from convoy supporters, reportedly mainly from the United States, came close to jamming Ottawa's crucial 9-1-1 emergency line. Many residents described to us a growing fear that nowhere was safe, and no one could assume they were safe.

VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY

We deal in the next section with the sense of abandonment felt by residents and businesses, who were deeply distressed by the failure of police and other officials to protect them from the convoy occupation's violence. That inaction on the part of police and bylaw officers in particular very quickly led to a climate of impunity, in which many convoy participants evidently felt they could do what they wanted, and members of the community realized there were seemingly no limits as to how disruptive and threatening the convoy would be allowed to become.

Residents described to us the bullish swagger, defiance and belligerent sense of entitlement in many of their encounters and confrontations with convoy participants. That added a sinister edge to the violence, as it became clear to residents that the individuals who were mocking, harassing and attacking them believed they could do as they pleased, without consequence or accountability.

THE VIOLENCE OF MENACE, UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR

We heard many accounts from individuals who felt that the overall climate and atmosphere of the convoy occupation was inherently violent, none of which was assuaged by street parties, bouncy castles and hot tubs. Instead, they sensed volatility at every turn, leaving them in a constant state of stress and even terror. They felt there was a degree of menace just below the surface that might burst into the open at any time. They never knew if a group of convoy participants approaching them on the street would accost and threaten them. They watched in alarm from their apartment balconies as open fires burned beside propane tanks and fireworks were lit in confined areas near large trucks full of explosive fuel. Some were startled by fireworks hitting their apartment windows. Others, further away, questioned whether they were hearing fireworks or gunfire. They worried as well whether there were weapons hidden in vehicles. They anguished with the dread of never knowing what might happen next and how long the occupation would endure. This constant level of fear and uncertainty residents endured was far beyond irritation or distress. It was one more source of violence.

VIOLENCE LINGERS

We were deeply concerned to hear from many residents that the insecurity and fearfulness provoked by the convoy's violence lingers. They described ongoing anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges which were provoked or exacerbated by the convoy occupation and continue a year later. When they leave their homes, they do so with a reduced sense of safety. Hearing a horn, noticing a passing truck flying a Canadian flag, or seeing a congested street or blocked intersection can all readily trigger a renewed sense of panic. Many residents told us that they are pursuing counselling.

A clear indication of the intensity of the continuing fear and trauma was the number of people who told us that they had not felt safe to talk about their experience previously. While they were grateful for the opportunity to do so at the People's Commission, many did so only after readying themselves for the distress they would feel about remembering what had happened to them, and they feared that coming forward publicly might put them at risk of being targeted for online smear attacks or even physical violence.

There was nothing peaceful or even "mainly peaceful" about the convoy. It arrived violently. It committed, permitted and promoted acts and expressions of violence. It left residents on edge and unrelentingly fearful of violence. And the impact of that violence is still with the community more than one year later.

The Convoy's Impact

ABANDONED TO VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

Coping with an unprecedented occupation of their neighbourhoods that had brought their lives to a grinding halt, and facing violence and human rights abuse that terrorized people and forced countless businesses to close and lay off staff, residents and business owners in downtown Ottawa necessarily and understandably looked to police and other officials for protection. But it was not forthcoming. Quite the contrary, those expectations and explicit requests for protection were ignored and even outright refused.

Almost every person who testified in OPC hearings or provided written submissions outlining their concerns about the convoy's impact spoke – with a combined sense of disbelief, distress and outrage – of feeling utterly abandoned by the officials they count on to keep them safe.

- Abandoned when convoy vehicles were welcomed and even directed into their neighbourhoods with little thought for how disruptive that would be for residents and local business.
- Abandoned when it became clear bylaw officers would not be enforcing parking, idling, noise and public safety infractions, and police would not pursue complaints of assault, hate crimes and other criminal acts.

- Abandoned when public buildings such as libraries and community centres were closed, transit services including essential Para Transpo service curtailed, and vital social programs cut back.
- Abandoned when it became clear that economic losses associated with border blockades, and not the traumatic harms related to community safety, were the impetus for much delayed enforcement action.
- Abandoned when few opportunities were provided for meaningful community input into the official reviews and inquiries into the convoy experience and use of the *Emergencies Act*.
- Abandoned in the convoy's aftermath, with no apologies offered for this failure of protection and no redress for the very real harms and financial losses that residents endured.

For many downtown residents, who are members of racialized, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, disabled and other marginalized communities, abandonment was nothing new. They have in fact come to expect that police and other officials are frequently more likely to be a source of oppression and violence, than of safety and protection. For many other people in the downtown core – residents and business owners alike – who have long counted on protection being there if and when it is needed, this was a stunning and deeply unsettling revelation.

This troubling abandonment of neighbourhoods that are home to 100,000 people and where countless small businesses operate, is by no means just reflective of governance deficits and operational shortcomings. It is at its very heart a colossal failure of human rights. At the very core of the international human rights system is recognition that not only must governments refrain from committing human rights violations, they must act to uphold human rights overall.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Canada has been a party since 1976, underscores the “obligation of States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and freedoms”⁹ and specifically obliges governments “to take the necessary steps ... to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant”¹⁰

As such, governments must take positive action to protect people from human rights abuses that are perpetrated by private groups and individuals, such as the convoy organizers and participants. That does not mean that governments will always succeed in preventing and ending those human rights abuses and keeping people safe from any and all resulting harms; but there is an obligation to take all reasonable steps towards that end. It is clear, from the extensive testimony and submissions we heard, that governments fell far short of and, in fact, abdicated that fundamental responsibility.

We heard from individuals who drew parallels between the failure of police and officials to respond to the convoy violence and their similar failure to respond to gender-based violence, a comparison that was also made in an opinion piece in the Ottawa Citizen by Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich of Women's Shelters Canada, who noted that,

[f]or women who have experienced intimate partner violence, the actions — or inactions — of the police towards the protesters are a reminder of how often they themselves are not believed, or feel that things need to get markedly worse before there will be any intervention. It is a reminder of the incredulity they've faced in family court when the rights of their abusers are brought up rather than their own rights to live free from violence.¹¹

We discuss this further in our conclusions to this report, where we recommend that a comprehensive human rights framework for Ottawa be adopted.

ENFORCEMENT ABANDONED

In Part I of our report we included excerpts from residents' testimony and submissions, describing their extensive attempts to have police or bylaw officers take enforcement action. They quickly came to understand that their efforts were largely pointless, as decisions had been taken not to enforce laws and bylaws in the red zone. Concerned that they did not want to take any action that might inflame the situation and provoke a violent response from convoy participants, police and bylaw officers stood by and allowed assaults, threats, including death threats, toxic incidents of racism and hate crimes, dangerous driving, and countless parking, idling, noise and public safety infractions to occur without penalty or consequence.

In many instances residents were even expressly told that the reason police or bylaw officers would not take enforcement action was because the offence was occurring in the red zone or because the vehicle in question was associated with the convoy. Residents who did manage to file a criminal complaint because of dogged perseverance, often despite being actively dissuaded from doing so, then inevitably saw it go

⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, fourth preambular paragraph.

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 2(2).

¹¹ Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich. 'But did he hit you?' The parallels between the 'Freedom Convoy' and domestic violence, Ottawa Citizen, 4 February, 2022, <https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/geiger-bardswich-but-did-he-hit-you-the-parallels-between-the-freedom-convoy-and-domestic-violence>.

nowhere. In some cases shared with us, police refused to take a complaint even after witnessing a resident be shoved and pushed by convoy participants, or be struck by a slow moving truck.

Police often told residents that they were “awaiting orders” and for the time being were, essentially, passive observers. It was not lost on residents however, that some police appeared to be particularly friendly with convoy participants and supportive of their aims. They witnessed police and convoy participants laughing and taking selfies together. Some people described to us a feeling of complete betrayal when they became aware of reports that emerged later, including during the POEC, of some former and possibly even current police allegedly going to the extent of sharing information about enforcement plans with convoy organizers. Because of this failure, in fact refusal, to carry out essential law enforcement, many people had to take private measures to fill the protection void. For instance, we heard from condominium dwellers who hired private security to patrol the entrance lobby of their building.

Understandably residents and business owners felt abandoned in a city core that officials had allowed to become lawless. Not only was this a source of frustration and aggravation, it dramatically compounded the anxiety and fear people were feeling as a result of the mounting violence. It was one thing to cope with the violence; yet another to know they would not be protected from it.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES ABANDONED

A wide range of essential public services and programs were cancelled or significantly cut back during the convoy occupation. That included programs and services operated by government agencies and by non-profit organizations and charitable groups. A significant number of stores closed or significantly

reduced their opening hours as well, including grocery stores and pharmacies, making it very difficult for people to purchase food, renew prescriptions and buy other essential items.

Many people told us about the impact of transit services in the downtown core being cancelled, reduced or rerouted. Very significantly, the Para Transpo service, relied upon by people with disabilities, the elderly and people with other mobility limitations, stopped running throughout the red zone for the duration of the convoy occupation. For many people this was far more than an inconvenience, it was the only way for them to shop for groceries and medical supplies, travel to medical appointments, and attend cherished programs offered by social service agencies. There was very little available to pick up the slack as taxis and ride services were also cancelled or dramatically restricted and friends and family from outside the downtown area were generally unable to drive in and offer rides.

The range of programs and services that were curtailed during the convoy occupation was extensive. We heard firsthand of restricted programs for street-involved 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, cuts in meal deliveries for people with disabilities, restrictions in delivering critical oxygen supplies to people who need it because of respiratory ailments, and scaling back of programs offering hot meals or food bank items to people who are homeless or on limited incomes. Drop-in programs, libraries and community centres, which can be lifelines for people coping with isolation, loneliness and mental health challenges were shut. Street teams that deliver life-saving support, offering food, counsel and harm reduction supplies, couldn't do their nightly rounds. Even the Rideau Centre, which serves as a type of community centre for people throughout the downtown who are in need of a place to socialize or to stay warm, was closed.

What is at stake in all of these instances is human rights. These decisions to stop or cutback essential programs and services had a direct impact on people's rights to food, to physical and mental health, to access healthcare, to freedom of movement and other basic rights. Yet for the people who were impacted, there was very little done to ensure that those needs would nevertheless be met. People were largely left to their own devices to figure out how to do so. We heard from many vulnerable downtown residents in our hearings and in consultation sessions held in social housing buildings, apartments and condominiums with a preponderance of people with disabilities and the elderly, and the premises of community agencies working with vulnerable populations. We asked whether anyone from the police or government agencies checked in to ensure that they were safe and were able to meet their basic needs despite the restricted transit, programs and services. Almost no one had any such contact from officials. They were abandoned.

COMMUNICATION ABANDONED

In the face of a staggering crisis that had turned life upside down for tens of thousands of residents and businesses throughout central Ottawa, there was also a staggering failure of communication. There was no coherent, consistent and comprehensive public service communication, providing information on risks and available support, promoting helplines or safe spaces, and offering assurances and assistance.

It was not until February 14 that Ottawa Public Health issued a statement of concern about impacts of the convoy occupation on residents. On February 18 they issued a further statement on the negative impact of diesel fumes, in particular on convoy participants but also neighbouring residents. But their primary advice was to avoid the area, which was not an option for those who live there and did not have the means to move elsewhere.

Glaringly, residents and business owners found it next to impossible to get meaningful, timely information from police or government officials about the evolving security situation in their neighbourhoods. Such information was essential to shop and restaurant owners trying to decide whether it was safe to open for business. It was vital to residents assessing the relative risk of going to the grocery store versus the reality of dwindling food supplies. Yet information of that nature was simply not provided through official channels at a time when one would expect regular, detailed bulletins several times per day. Instead people relied on media outlets, social media channels and their own informal networks and word of mouth. Some of that information was reliable, some of it was largely rumours. We did hear frequent gratitude from residents for the regular information updates sent out by Somerset Councillor Catherine McKenney. And we heard appreciation from business leaders for Rideau-Vanier Councillor Mathieu Fleury's efforts to arrange briefings for BIAs and businesses.

Providing timely, meaningful information to residents and business owners would not only have been a good public relations move, it is also a human rights obligation. International human rights law recognizes that people have a right to "seek, receive and impart information."¹³ It is well established that being able to access information is often central to protecting human rights, and certainly is the basis for being able to make well informed decisions about matters that implicate human rights. The UN Human Rights Committee has stated, therefore, that in addition to allowing people to seek access to information of their own accord, governments "should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest" and "should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information."¹⁴ This obligation was not met, a failure that caused increased stress and insecurity for residents and business owners.

¹³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 19(2).

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 34, Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, UN Document CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September, 2011, para. 19, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FGC%2F34&Lang=en.

COMMUNITY POLICING AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ABANDONED

The City had at its disposal two well-established programs – community policing and emergency management – that could and should have been central to their response to the violence and human rights abuses residents were experiencing during the convoy occupation. Community Police Officers have a mandate to partner with community members “to improve community well-being, safety and security through joint problem identification, analysis, response and evaluation.”¹⁵ The City’s Office of Emergency Management oversees the Municipal Emergency Plan, the stated objective of which is to “[m]aintain public confidence by: protecting the health and safety of employees, saving lives, reducing suffering, protecting public health, protecting infrastructure and property, protecting the environment, and reducing economic and social losses.”¹⁶

We heard from a number of downtown residents, business owners and staff from community agencies who have developed close relationships with the Community Police Officer in their neighbourhood. However, just when their role was more vital than ever and would have been integral to assessing and understanding the challenges faced within the community, people learned that many, even most of those officers had been redeployed instead to operations on Wellington Street.

We also heard from residents and business owners who are well acquainted with the City’s emergency management program, and have seen the emergency plan be very well executed in other crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather events, and flooding. Central to those emergency responses has been a determined effort to reach out to residents in impacted areas,

to ensure their safety and well-being. People were mystified at the clear failure to do so during the convoy occupation.

These two examples, referred to by many people who testified to the People’s Commission, deepen the sense of abandonment, as there were two existing programs which could have been used effectively to, at the very least, monitor and assess the harms being experienced at community level. They were not.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY ABANDONED

Residents and business owners repeatedly indicated to us that they found it confusing, in fact impossible, to figure out who was in charge of the response to the convoy occupation. Who was making the key decisions? Who should they turn to with requests for information? Who should they expect to be taking steps to protect their rights? Little wonder they felt abandoned.

The City of Ottawa’s submission to the POEC makes clear the convoy occupation was initially identified as just another demonstration, perhaps larger than most, and consequently the OPS would be in command. The impact on traffic was seen as the principal concern. Yet even after it became clear the convoy participants were dug in for a long stay, the City did not expand its focus beyond ‘maintaining public order’ to ‘protecting public health and safety’ and continued to leave matters in police hands.

As such, OPS effectively retained singular leadership of the response, focused solely on public order – essentially avoiding a riot. The City’s Emergency Operations Centre and command structure role was to “manage the impact on City services” and support OPS.¹⁷ What was missing was recognition that the threat had changed and was likely to persist, and

¹⁵ Ottawa Police Service, *Community Police Centres*, <https://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/community-safety-and-crime-prevention/community-police-centres.aspx>.

¹⁶ City of Ottawa, *Emergency Management Program Municipal Emergency Plan*, 10 December, 2021, p. 8, https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/documents/mep_2021_en.pdf.

¹⁷ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Institutional Report submitted by the City of Ottawa*, p. 11.

there were tens of thousands of people whose rights were at risk and needed protection and support.

To the extent the City did turn attention to the needs of residents, we heard repeatedly that they relied largely on already over-stretched community partners to shoulder the risk and overcome the additional barriers to reach the people in need of protection and assistance. Just like their clients, many of the staff of these organizations are women, racialized, immigrants, disabled, stigmatized or otherwise at greater risk. Yet while it was unsafe for City staff – and OPS itself – to operate within the red zone alone or without escorts, there was no concerted effort to protect the health and safety of these community partners and their staff, or to systematically facilitate their access to people who needed their support and services.

The POEC makes it clear as well that there was a blatant abdication of responsibility on the part of the Ontario provincial government. An entire section of the final report is entitled “Ontario’s Absence” in which Justice Rouleau notes that “the Province was not as engaged when protests in Ontario were limited to Ottawa.”¹⁸ We heard frequent criticism from residents and business owners of the provincial government’s disinterest in what was happening in Ottawa and that it was only the economic concerns related to the bridge blockade between Windsor and Detroit that spurred Premier Ford to pay attention to the convoy.

ABANDONED IN THE AFTERMATH

Feelings of abandonment did not end when the trucks rolled out of Ottawa. They have continued and, in some ways, deepened since. Many people who appeared before the People’s Commission emotionally welcomed the opportunity to do so, noting that the official reviews and inquiries underway offered very little space for meaningful input from the residents and business owners who bore the brunt of the convoy occupation. We were holding some of our hearings at the point in the POEC process when

convoy organizers and participants were given almost an entire week to testify, far more time than had been allotted for community witnesses. That imbalance understandably rankled members of the community, leading many to describe it as one more indication that their views and experience did not matter.

Residents have also been abandoned when it comes to redress for what they experienced. International human rights law requires that “any person whose rights or freedoms... are violated shall have an effective remedy.”¹⁹ Yet there has been little to no effort to ensure that is the case for residents whose rights were abused by convoy participants and then further violated by the failure and refusal of officials to provide protection and support.

The municipal, provincial and federal governments have all instituted compensation programs for businesses that suffered losses during the convoy.²⁰ Some minimal information was made available to residents by the City, essentially offering help to individuals in accessing support through existing social assistance programs for those who were eligible. But nothing more has been offered. We heard from many people who lost working hours or income during the convoy and have received no compensation or support. Nothing has been provided to reimburse people for extra expenses they incurred in coping with the convoy’s impact, nor is there any compensation being offered for the harms people suffered as a result of the violence they experienced and the failure of police and officials to provide protection. The class action lawsuit filed on behalf of Zexi Li and local residents by Ottawa lawyer Paul Champ’s firm may, if successful, offer some amount of redress for residents within the red zone. Yet residents in other areas of central Ottawa also suffered considerable harm and losses.

Even an apology would be welcome, ideally from all three levels of government. To date, none has been forthcoming.

¹⁸ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 1, p. 61.

¹⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 2(3)(a).

²⁰ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Institutional Report submitted by the City of Ottawa*, p. 21-22.

The Convoy's Impact

THE COMMUNITY MOBILIZES

Abandoned in the face of a violent occupation, members of the community mobilized to help each other in many different ways. They could readily see what was needed to provide the protection and support that was not on offer from police and officials. Lacking resources and the legal powers at governments' disposal, they nonetheless came together in an effort to fill some of those gaps. There was particular concern for friends and neighbours who were most vulnerable to the convoy occupation's impact. Some of these community efforts were more visible than others. Many were informal and ad hoc and did not attract publicity. Most were intentionally kept quiet and below the radar because of people's fears of being singled out on social media for online threats, trolling and doxing from convoy participants and supporters, and also out of concern police might resist or even attempt to shut down some community level initiatives.

It is of course not at all unusual for people to come together in a crisis and provide mutual support in a spirit of compassion and generosity. It is often said that such situations bring out the best in a community. That certainly is what happened during the convoy occupation crisis, and there is much that is admirable and commendable about what happened. What makes this different, however, from community resilience following an extreme weather

event like a flood or tornado, is that the solidarity and support was necessary, not only because of the harms experienced, in this instance the convoy occupation, but also because of the abject failure of officials to provide protection. The community responded because the state was largely indifferent to their plight.

We were particularly concerned to hear accounts from several people who were involved in organizing and leading various community initiatives, who described opposition and a lack of support on the part of police or government officials, particularly at municipal level. A number of people noted that this is consistent with their experiences around community mobilization and engagement in Ottawa more widely, with such initiatives often treated with suspicion and opposition. Increasingly, activists and community-based advocacy organizations in the city are criticized and targeted by police, and municipal politicians and officials. When the community takes steps to address concerns, promote new approaches and advocate changes which aim to better protect human rights in the city, those efforts are worthy of support, not disinterest or hostility. We address these concerns later in this report, laying out conclusions and recommendations related to leadership and civic engagement.

MEETING BASIC NEEDS

In neighbourhoods directly affected by the occupation, people mobilized to ensure basic needs were being met, particularly with respect to food and healthcare. Given it had quickly become impossible to use transit services, and was dangerous or intimidating to go anywhere on foot, there was immediate concern about the challenges faced by people with disabilities and the elderly, many of whom were simply unable or too fearful to go out to a nearby grocery store or pharmacy, or travel to a food bank. Many of the programs that offered meals to people with disabilities and seniors were suspended, adding to food insecurity for vulnerable groups.

People came together in a variety of different ways to ensure the basic needs of their neighbours and other members of the community were addressed. Food and other essential supplies were collected in apartment buildings and shared among neighbours in need. Meals for people with disabilities were prepared and distributed, including within networks that were spearheaded by other people with disabilities. Mutual aid groups, faith communities and community agencies stepped into the breach.

KEEPING EACH OTHER SAFE

It quickly became apparent to people in central Ottawa neighbourhoods that they could not count on police and bylaw officials to protect them from the violence and other human rights abuses they were experiencing. As such, they began to organize, informally and more formally, using Discord, Facebook and word of mouth, to look out for each other and offer some sense of community safety.

People checked in to make sure vulnerable neighbours were okay. They accompanied each other on trips to grocery stores and pharmacies. Partners and friends accompanied night workers in and out

of the red zone. There were more formally organized community safety walks, such as the one led by downtown city councillors Catherine McKenney, Shawn Menard and Jeff Lieper on February 4, intended to “keep each other safe” and “check in on and support local businesses.”²¹ Subsequent attempts to organize further community walks were canceled by the councillors, who were concerned it was too unsafe. Walks were also arranged by the volunteer-led Safety Walks Ottawa initiative. Another group of volunteers dropped off thousands of bags of earplugs in apartment buildings and shelters, so people could protect themselves from the pain of blaring truck horns.²²

MONITORING AND DOCUMENTING

We heard from many residents who were concerned that because police and bylaw officers were not carrying out enforcement actions, particularly in the red zone, there would not be a reliable record of the crimes, infractions and human rights abuses associated with the convoy occupation. Several people took steps to fill that void.

In essence, these individuals became human rights monitors. They wanted to send a message to convoy participants that they were being watched. And they realized how important it was to collect information that would help document what had happened. People often did this work on their own, out on the streets sometimes late at night, taking photographs, recording videos, and writing down license plate numbers and other information. They described to us how fearful they felt at times, as well as occasions when they were confronted and even assaulted by convoy participants.

This evidence has proven critical in documenting the extent and depth of the impact of the convoy occupation; all the more so because police declined to take reports of criminal and bylaw infractions. Some of the evidence these citizen monitors

²¹ Menard, S. @ShawnMenard1. [Tweet], 4 February, 2022. <https://twitter.com/ShawnMenard1/status/1489617775807062021>.

²² Erika Ibrahim, *Ottawa community members step up for downtown neighbours amid convoy demonstrations*, Toronto Star, 9 February, 2022, <https://www.thestar.com/politics/2022/02/09/ottawa-community-members-step-up-for-downtown-neighbours-amid-convoy-demonstrations.html>.

gathered contributed to the strength of the class action described below, and some has informed our own understanding of the convoy occupation – and that of other inquiries. As well, some of this evidence has been incorporated into the OPC's convoy timeline.

OPC is itself an expression of the community's commitment to document the experience of the convoy occupation, using that evidence to press for action to redress harms and avert future harms.

TAKING LEGAL ACTION

Tormented by the excruciating impact of the blaring truck horns and seeing no relief through enforcement of noise bylaws, the community took matters in their own hands and mounted a remarkable court challenge, launched by Champ & Associates, a law firm located in Centretown.

Zexi Li, representing residents in the red zone, the Happy Goat Coffee Company and Union: Local 613, on behalf of businesses in the area, and Geoffrey Devaney, representing workers who lost wages, launched a class action lawsuit for private and public nuisance against convoy organizers and participants, seeking damages for the considerable harms and losses they experienced during the occupation. The lawsuit is ongoing and is currently before the courts.²³

Notably, at the height of the occupation, the legal team obtained two interim injunctions, on February 7 and 16, pursuant to which convoy participants were "restrained and enjoined from using air horns or train horns"²⁴. Throughout our proceedings we heard repeatedly from residents that news of those injunctions gave them the first feeling of hope that the human rights abuses they were experiencing might actually come to an end.

It was an enormous effort to assemble and prepare the necessary plaintiffs, experts, evidence and legal documents for the lawsuit and injunction application on such short notice. Members of the community assisted in whatever ways they could. There were even voluntary security patrols by off-duty commissionaires, keeping a watchful eye on the law firm's office.

We were particularly concerned to learn the legal team received no support from the City of Ottawa, even though City officials and lawyers requested the court materials and observed the injunction application. The City's resources, access to evidence and in-depth knowledge of the Municipal Act would have been of tremendous assistance to the overstretched legal team that was pursuing the injunction on a pro bono basis. The City subsequently obtained its own injunction on February 14, one full week after the community's initial injunction. That injunction was broader than prohibiting air horns and included idling, fireworks and open fires.²⁵ There was no collaboration between the City and the community, even though the community's legal team had always kept City officials apprised of the steps they were taking. In fact, they were not even aware of the City's application for an injunction until the day it was granted. The City's disinterest in the community's legal efforts seemed, to some people close to the case, to extend beyond indifference and border on passive hostility.

STANDING VIGIL AND PUSHING BACK

Community mobilization and solidarity was also evident in the various demonstrations, large and small, that took place, an opportunity for residents to express their opposition and resistance to the occupation of their neighbourhoods.

²³ Ottawa Convoy Class Action, *Zexi Li v Chris Barber et al*, 4 February 2022 <https://ottawaconvoyclassaction.ca/>.

²⁴ Ottawa Convoy Class Action, *Documents*, <https://ottawaconvoyclassaction.ca/documents>.

²⁵ Bruce Deachman, *No more fireworks: Judge grants city injunction against convoy protesters*, Ottawa Citizen, February 14, 2022 <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/no-more-fireworks-judge-grants-city-injunction-against-convoy-protestors>.

At an early stage, on January 31, three women bravely stood in front of a large truck from the convoy that was aggressively trying to drive down their residential street in Centretown. They took that stand because they were already worried about the impact of the occupation on their neighbours.²⁶ News of their courageous action spread quickly on social media, and inspired others to come forward. Statements from ecumenical groups, the Centretown Community Health Centre, unions and others helped give voice to the anguish and concerns of residents.

Hundreds of people joined a protest in front of City Hall on February 5, to express opposition to the convoy. Police kept counter-protesters apart from convoy supporters and participants who were demonstrating across the street. Other people took to standing vigil outside OPS headquarters, maintaining an ongoing presence there to convey the message that residents were waiting for the police to take action.

A spontaneous coalition of labour and community activists under the umbrella Community Solidarity Ottawa (CSO) organized a march from Lansdowne Park through the Glebe on February 12. This event attracted thousands with its message of support for those on the frontlines in fighting the COVID pandemic, and rejecting the hateful messages and attitudes that were given oxygen by the convoy occupation. In the following weeks, CSO organized a number of events, marches and rallies, declaring Ottawa a 'hate-free zone' and promoting inclusion and solidarity.

Most famously, in what has become known as the Battle of Billings Bridge, residents took action on February 13 to stop the arrival of a number of pick-up trucks and cars that were destined to join the occupation downtown. In what was essentially a spontaneous initiative, a group of residents – a handful at first, which grew to over 200 in the space of a few hours and drew as many as a thousand

participants over the course of a very cold day – blocked the intersection of Bank Street and Riverside Drive, and refused to allow the vehicles to pass.

We heard from a number of people who organized or participated in the Billings Bridge protest. They outlined measures they put in place to avoid the situation escalating and becoming dangerous to protesters. They were surprised and concerned about how directly police tried to dissuade them from blocking Riverside Drive. Some of the people who took part told us that they received what felt like veiled threats from police officers, who stated they could not guarantee their safety and they might face a risk of being arrested themselves. In the end the counter-protest was a success. No one was hurt. And the drivers eventually agreed to abandon their plans to join the convoy downtown, and turned around and left the city.

The Battle of Billings Bridge was a watershed in many ways and certainly was a clear indication to officials – some people described it to us as a 'wakeup call' – as to the toll that the occupation was taking on residents, who were clearly now resolutely prepared and determined to go to greater lengths in an effort to push back and reclaim their community. Notably, the Emergencies Act was invoked the following day.

²⁶ Priscilla Ki Sun Hwang, *The story behind this photo of downtown residents blocking a truck's path*, CBC News, 1 February, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/downtown-ottawa-street-residents-take-stance-block-truck-1.6335139>.

The Convoy's Impact

SUPPORT FOR THE CONVOY

While it was certainly a minority view, there was nonetheless support for the convoy among some residents and business owners in central Ottawa. We heard testimony and received submissions from a number of people who were enthusiastic supporters, took part in convoy activities and hosted convoy participants in their homes. Very few lived or worked directly in the red zone, however, or in locations where they would have had to contend with the blaring horns or diesel exhaust on an ongoing basis. Convoy supporters we heard from lived at the outer edges or just outside the neighbourhoods most directly impacted by the occupation. Most did, however, come into the central occupied area frequently.

It is beyond our mandate or our capacity to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the range of individuals who organized and supported the convoy, their motivations for doing so, and their relationships to each other and to a web of other organizations. While concerns about vaccines – notably Canada/US cross-border vaccine mandates for truckers – ostensibly brought convoy participants together, it was readily apparent that the binding agent was much wider and more sinister than that.

Convoy supporters shared a deep resentment and paranoia about what they generally perceived to be government overreach in their lives, and a particular animus towards Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Moreover, opposition to COVID-control measures effectively served as a gateway

conspiracy, providing an entry point for a broad and diverse range of participants and supporters into an ecosystem in which anti-evidence, anti-democratic and right-wing conspiracy theories thrive. Within this ecosystem, white-supremacist, racist, misogynist, homo and transphobic, antisemitic and Islamophobic views are propagated, embraced and evangelized.

What the convoy supporters we heard from had in common was unconditional opposition to COVID vaccine and masking mandates. Most had made a personal choice not to be vaccinated and to not comply with mandatory masking protocols. As a result, they have faced difficult circumstances over the course of the pandemic. Some lost their jobs or were not allowed to operate their personal businesses. They faced restrictions on entering shops, restaurants and other establishments, and attending public events. Some have school age children who could not attend in-person classes because they refused to wear masks. Most described being ostracized by neighbours as social pariahs, and even being shunned by friends and family. They spoke of feeling very much alone and isolated and welcomed the sense of community and belonging they found among convoy supporters. Some spoke of the convoy's arrival as a moment of "liberation".

OPC's own protocols were very much in keeping with COVID guidelines, including requiring people attending any of our public sessions to wear masks. We do not agree with or endorse disregard for public health rules and advice. We do readily recognize that individuals who, of their own volition,

chose not to abide by those protocols felt vilified and misunderstood, causing them considerable loneliness, anxiety and distress. We are also cognizant, however, that the pressures of coping with illness and even death, severe restrictions on daily life, and considerable fear and stress during the pandemic that was a cause of mental health strains, has taken a considerable toll on everyone in the community, regardless of whether they chose to follow vaccine, masking and other public health rules or not.

Some of the convoy supporters who registered to appear before OPC did so under false pretences, indicating in advance they intended to share negative experiences of and opposition to the convoy. When they testified, they began by revealing they were in fact convoy supporters but had not disclosed their real views because they assumed they would be screened out and not allowed to make a presentation. Other convoy supporters were aggressive and even confrontational in their presentations, again seemingly expecting we would cut their time short.

In all instances we made it clear that as long as they focused their comments on our mandate – namely the convoy's impact on the community – and did not seek to engage in debates about vaccine science and the effectiveness of masking mandates, we were indeed ready and prepared to hear from them. That changed the tone and tenor of the presentations of some convoy supporters, who appeared to appreciate the opportunity simply to be heard, something they have had few opportunities for during the pandemic. It left us reflecting on how important it is to open up spaces in society for constructive dialogue about difficult issues.

While perhaps not surprising, it was nevertheless troubling that most of the convoy supporters we heard from were dismissive of the concerns expressed by residents about human rights abuses they experienced because of the behaviour of convoy participants. Most denied that there was any negative impact, describing their own experiences and observations with the convoy as a positive and celebratory affair.

Some supporters conceded there may have been an occasional isolated example of bad behaviour, such as the display of Nazi or Confederate flags, for which the convoy should not be held responsible. Others held a convoluted view that the presence of the Nazi flag, in particular, may have been misunderstood, suggesting that rather than expressing support for Nazism, it might have been intended as a warning that COVID-measures were a harbinger of fascism. There was no acknowledgement of how deeply traumatizing such symbols are for certain groups, and how offensive they are in general as hateful expressions of racist ideology.

To the extent that some supporters agreed that the truck horns had been too loud and downtown neighbourhoods were overly congested, they generally insisted the impact was no more than the level of disruption that should be expected in a neighbourhood close to Parliament in which rowdy protests should be anticipated. Several convoy supporters stressed that any complaints about the convoy's impact should lie at the feet of the federal government, and not be directed at convoy organizers and participants, because it was government-imposed COVID mandates that led to the convoy and because political leaders had refused to meet with convoy leaders. Only one supporter expressed empathy for residents who had felt traumatized or harmed by the convoy.

The experience of hearing from this group of convoy supporters – be that about how deeply misunderstood and isolated they felt during the pandemic, or their inability or refusal to hear and appreciate how harmed and abandoned the residents of central Ottawa felt during the convoy – emphasized to us the widening fissures that have taken hold in society around crucial issues, with toxic social and political impact. We clearly need to rediscover how to listen to and hear each other, and build bridges across areas of polarizing disagreement, founded in a shared commitment to human rights. We come back to this in our conclusions and recommendations.

What We've Learned And What Needs To Change

In considering this sorry litany of harms and failures, the People's Commission concludes there is an urgent need for substantive change which includes adoption of a human rights framework for Ottawa, new models of leadership and civic engagement, increased responsiveness in the face of crises, and action to foster dialogue and build community.

A HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK FOR OTTAWA

Perhaps the most glaring failure that permeated all aspects of the convoy experience was the complete absence of human rights protections and guarantees for residents of Ottawa. That begins, of course, with the absence of action to prevent the myriad human rights abuses committed by convoy participants. It extends to the failure to ensure that decisions and actions taken by officials in response to the convoy were at all times informed and guided by the human rights obligations of all three orders of government. And this absence of human rights continues in the aftermath of the convoy occupation, particularly in the notable lack of meaningful redress and accountability from government for the serious harms experienced by residents and businesses.

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

While we have concluded the convoy was by its very nature far from a peaceful protest and effectively amounted to an occupation of Ottawa's downtown core, it is also the case that many of the activities associated with the convoy were indeed legitimate protest activities. From the POEC

report, it is also evident that convoy organizers and participants had differing understandings among themselves as to the nature of their activities. Some did indeed largely approach it as legitimate, albeit disruptive, protest, while others clearly intended something much more intrusive, harmful and even sinister.

While human rights laws and treaties rarely reference the right to protest explicitly, it is well recognized to be a right that arises from other rights, particularly the three freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Those freedoms are laid out in numerous international human rights instruments, binding on Canada, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Critically, they are also enshrined in section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As a starting point in our human rights analysis, the People's Commission absolutely affirms that the right to peaceful protest is an essential and sacrosanct right. It is a vital cornerstone of democracy in that it is a means to hold governments to account and draw attention to human rights violations. In many ways it offers an important avenue for strengthening human rights protections. In a recent report to the UN Human Rights Council, Clément Voule, the UN Special Rapporteur on rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association notes that,

protests are vital to the life of healthy societies, allowing underrepresented viewpoints and the voices of those otherwise excluded to be taken into account. Protests have been particularly

important in facilitating participation of otherwise excluded groups such as youth, ethnic, racial and other minorities, women, children, LGBTQI+ persons and other marginalized communities and victims' groups. Protests are also often essential to holding Governments, and rights violators in general, accountable.²⁷

The People's Commission is acutely aware that the right to protest is increasingly challenged and undermined by governments, in Canada and around the world. In Canada, that is abundantly clear in light of aggressive state responses to Indigenous, anti-Black racism, environmental and homelessness protests, and excessive policing of demonstrations held in conjunction with international meetings such as the G8, G7 and G20 Summits in Toronto in 2010 and Québec City in 2018.

Notably, Amnesty International, deeply concerned about mounting attacks on the right to protest worldwide, recently launched a global campaign to shore up respect for and protection of this important right. Amnesty draws specific attention to the double standard that is apparent in how protest rights are respected in Canada. With regard to the convoy occupation, Amnesty notes that, "[t]he protest was initially tolerated by police authorities despite deeply troubling reports of violence, harassment, intimidation and hate speech, including Nazi flags, Confederate flags, and other symbols of racism and hate being used by protesters."

This stands in "clear contradiction to the way the Canadian police have cracked down on Indigenous people defending their lands from unwanted fossil fuel expansion projects..."²⁸

While it is a precious right, the right to protest is, in its very conception and formulation, not without its limits. International human rights treaties recognize that it may be appropriate to constrain the freedom of peaceful assembly, for instance, when "necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."²⁹

These limits should be narrowly applied and only when strictly necessary. The UN Human Rights Committee, charged with the responsibility of monitoring state compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), stresses that when it comes to restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, enshrined in article 21 of the ICCPR, "[a]uthorities must be able to show that any restrictions meet the requirement of legality, and are also both necessary for and proportionate to at least one of the permissible grounds for restrictions... Restrictions must not be discriminatory, impair the essence of the right, or be aimed at discouraging participation in assemblies or causing a chilling effect."³⁰

²⁷ *Protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests during crisis situations*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, UN Document A/HRC/50/42, 16 May, 2022, para 10, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/343/05/PDF/G2234305.pdf?OpenElement>. See also: Jamie Cameron, *Commissioned Paper: Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Section 2(c) of the Charter*, Public Order Emergency Commission, September 2022, page 12, <https://publicorderemergencycommission.ca/files/documents/Policy-Papers/Freedom-of-Peaceful-Assembly-and-Section-2c-of-the-Charter-Cameron.pdf>.

²⁸ Amnesty International, *Protect the Protest! Why we must save our right to protest*, July 2022, page 27, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT30/5856/2022/en/>. The RCMP's Civilian Review and Complaints Commission has launched a comprehensive review of the activities and tactics of the RCMP's Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), responsible for policing operations directed at a number of Indigenous and environmental protests in British Columbia. Until his appointment to head the Ottawa Police Service, Chief Eric Stubbs was an RCMP assistant commissioner in BC with responsibility for C-IRG. Brett Forrester, *Watchdog opens probe into RCMP unit that polices resource standoffs in B.C.*, CBC News, 9 March, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/crcc-cirg-watchdog-systemic-investigation-1.6773070>.

²⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 21.

³⁰ UN Human Rights Committee, *General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21)*, UN Document CCPR/C/GC/37, 17 September, 2020, para. 36, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/232/15/PDF/G2023215.pdf?OpenElement>.

In considering limitations on protest rights in the context of the convoy occupation, OPC has focused particularly on the degree to which such measures can or even more to the point, must be imposed for the “protection of the rights and freedoms of others.” The Human Rights Committee notes that this includes rights enumerated in the ICCPR, as well as other human rights of “people not participating in the assembly.” The Human Rights Committee recognizes that as assemblies “may entail by their very nature a certain level of disruption to ordinary life, such disruptions must be accommodated, unless they impose a disproportionate burden...”³¹

It is the “disproportionate burden” with respect to the human rights of people living and working in the neighbourhoods impacted by the convoy but who were not participating in it, that guides OPC’s consideration of the need to uphold the right to protest within a wider human rights framework.

It should be underlined that while people’s rights to protest must be protected, that right does not extend to vehicles, nor do people have an inherent right to bring their vehicle to a protest, and in particular make it a centrepiece of the protest’s tactics. While this may seem self-evident, it was apparently a source of some confusion among OPS leadership and their legal counsel in planning for the convoy.³² That lack of clarity created the conditions for the protest to become an occupation.

GOVERNMENT OBLIGATIONS TO RESPECT, PROTECT AND FULFIL HUMAN RIGHTS

Public debates and media coverage about the convoy have used many terms to describe the problematic conduct of convoy participants and the overall negative impact of the convoy’s presence on the community, including disrespect, criminality, public safety and public order infractions, disruption, intimidation, violence and, of course, occupation. There was, however, rarely recognition that what was transpiring also constituted a failure by governments to uphold their legal obligations to prevent or address significant abuses and violations of human rights.

As we note earlier in this report, many of the harmful acts endured by communities in central Ottawa were indeed human rights abuses, sometimes committed on a purely individual basis by specific convoy participants and in other instances clearly intended and/or tolerated by convoy organizers. The fact that human rights abuses were being committed in turn gives rise to important human rights obligations on the part of government to protect community members from those abuses.

Governments are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.³³ The obligation to respect means refraining from actions that interfere with or curtail the enjoyment of human rights. The obligation to protect means taking steps to protect human rights, when those rights are threatened by the acts of other groups and individuals.³⁴ The obligation to fulfil means taking positive, proactive measures to facilitate the enjoyment of human rights.

The obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights apply to all orders of government – municipal, provincial and federal – and are all applicable to the

³¹ Ibid., para. 47.

³² Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 2, p. 169.

³³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *International Human Rights Law*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law>.

³⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 31: The Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant*, UN Document CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, 26 May, 2004, para. 8, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2F%2F21%2FRev.1%2FAdd.13&Lang=en.

convoy experience, regarding convoy participants, and also residents, communities and businesses impacted by the convoy. It provides the framework for assessing the relationship between the right to protest, and the rights and freedoms of people in the communities coping with the presence of the convoy.

It is our conclusion that if governments had pursued this human rights approach in their response to the convoy, a very different experience of the occupation would have resulted: protest rights would have been protected, as would the human rights of residents, workers and business owners in central Ottawa.

- The state's **obligation to respect** human rights would extend to any concerns that police may have violated the rights of convoy participants, for instance, at any point during the convoy and in particular during the enforcement operation that took place after the invocation of the Emergencies Act. The POEC notes that between February 18 and 20, police in Ottawa made 273 arrests and laid 422 charges, and that "[m]ore broadly, between January 28 and March 31, 2022, the Ottawa Police Service laid 533 criminal charges against 140 individuals for actions arising from the Freedom Convoy."³⁵

Assessing the nature of police enforcement against convoy participants is not within OPC's mandate, which is focused on the convoy's impact on the community. OPC is not aware, however, of court decisions, media coverage, reports or other materials that document credible concerns about human rights violations against convoy participants during that phase of enforcement. None of the convoy supporters who testified before or made submissions to us described experiencing any such human rights violations themselves.

- The state's **obligation to protect** human rights extends to concerns about the failure of police and bylaw officers to exercise due diligence and take all reasonable steps possible to respond to requests for assistance from residents and businesses in impacted communities who were

looking to officials to endeavour to protect them from the human rights abuses, violence and other harms they were experiencing at the hands of convoy participants. That obligation requires states to pay close and particular attention to the circumstances of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of the community.

We have noted earlier in this report that the acts and conduct of many convoy participants – including physical threats and assault; the impact of blaring horns and noxious diesel fumes; racist and discriminatory threats and banners; antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and other incidents of hate; inability to operate businesses, and to work and earn an income; and the psychological torment that arose from the pervasive sense of fear and terror experienced by residents and business owners – all constituted human rights abuses. We have also highlighted the many ways that the human rights of Indigenous Peoples were disregarded by convoy organizers and participants, including rights related to land, territory, ceremony and sacred objects.

All orders of government also had a legal obligation to ensure the convoy occupation did not interfere disproportionately with residents' human rights to adequate housing, food, health care, education, a livelihood, and culture. We received an abundance of evidence indicating that these rights were not protected. As a result of the occupation, many residents were, for example, forced to leave their homes. Others – particularly those from disadvantaged groups – had to suffer intolerable noise within their homes. Mobility, particularly for older persons and those with disabilities, was severely curtailed. Many could not attend medical appointments, replenish medicines, access essential social and medical outreach services, or obtain food. Educational studies were significantly interrupted. Some lost wages or their jobs. Indigenous lands were occupied and culture appropriated.

³⁵ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

All of these experiences are violations of internationally and domestically protected human rights. It is clear to us that throughout the convoy occupation, police and governments did not have strategies in place to monitor and identify human rights abuses experienced by residents and business owners in central Ottawa, with a priority focus on the most marginalized members of the community. They made decisions to not enforce criminal laws and bylaws, for instance, that disregarded human rights impact and failed to take steps to address the resulting human rights abuses as they occurred. They appeared instead to be almost entirely focused on keeping an eye on Wellington Street. In our view, governments and police forces failed abysmally to meet their obligation to protect community members from these human rights abuses.

- The state's **obligation to fulfil** human rights has application both to convoy participants and to members of the community.
 - With respect to convoy participants, police and governments were obliged to ensure their right to peaceful protest would be facilitated and upheld. OPC unequivocally concludes that obligation was met. We heard directly from community members who witnessed police directing convoy vehicles into the downtown core, were aware of steps that were taken to ensure that participants had access to parking and staging areas such as the parking lot on Coventry Road, and described in detail the extent to which police and bylaw officers took effectively no steps for the first three weeks to limit protest activities or even to curtail unlawful actions of convoy participants. It is in fact remarkable, and perhaps even unprecedented, the extent to which convoy participants were given near free rein to be where they wished and act as they wanted; very different from the experience of protesters in many other demonstrations in Ottawa and other parts of the country.

In our view authorities went far beyond what was required of them in terms of facilitating convoy participants' right to protest. It is clear that the nature, location and activities of the convoy could have been substantially limited in ways that would have still meaningfully upheld the protest rights of participants.

- With respect to members of the community, government officials and, in some instances, police as well, are obliged to provide programs and services, and offer or ensure the availability of other necessary supports, so as to fulfil such crucial human rights as equality and non-discrimination, access to physical and mental health care, housing, food, freedom of movement and essential transportation. That requires developing a comprehensive human rights framework that maps the demographics and associated human rights needs of the community, so that those rights are fulfilled at all times, particularly during a crisis such as the convoy occupation.

A human rights framework would focus on and prioritize fulfilling the human rights of particularly vulnerable members of the community, including people with disabilities, homeless and street-involved individuals, Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, at-risk youth, women experiencing or at risk of violence, people living in poverty, and refugees and migrants. OPC is not aware of any such framework that was in place and guiding government and police decision-making during the convoy occupation. In our view, the human rights policies and strategies that exist within the City of Ottawa are, at best, piecemeal.

The lack of and inadequacy of the City's human rights policies is well evidenced by many of the decisions that were taken about suspending or limiting programs and services that are essential to fulfilling

the human rights of many members of the community, such as suspending Para Transpo service, that would simply not have been an option if a human rights framework was guiding decision-making.

FEDERALISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A principal theme that emerges in the findings of the Public Order Emergency Commission is what Justice Rouleau has termed a “failure of federalism.” In essence, the necessary cooperation and collaboration by different orders of government to address the threats raised by the convoy for the common good, did not happen.³⁶

The failure of federalism was, in our view, particularly evident when it came to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. That was reflected in much of the testimony we heard and submissions we received. Instinctively, community residents and business owners knew to look to their governments and police for protection from the human rights abuses they were experiencing. Yet it was confusing and uncertain which order of government and which police force to approach and for what. There were no consolidated and accessible points of contact and communication to simplify that process, and no clear leadership.

As a result, we repeatedly heard of people reaching out in many different directions, attempting to contact City councillors and their elected provincial and federal representatives, navigating through departments and agencies within all three orders of government (including in some instances the National Capital Commission), and seeking assistance – on the street, by phone, online or at headquarters and detachments – from any of the OPS, the OPP or the RCMP. While there were some notable exceptions, mostly elected officials and in particular downtown City councillors, in general people were directed elsewhere, or received no reply,

unhelpful responses or even outright refusals to provide assistance. All of this in response to entirely reasonable and particularly urgent requests for human rights protection.

This lack of coherence was certainly evident with respect to measures taken to protect residents from the violence and other human rights abuses carried out by convoy participants. It is deeply troubling that in many respects it took the extraordinary step of invoking the Emergencies Act, for instance, to mandate collaboration and coordination among police forces.

The lack of coherence is also glaring with respect to the obligation of governments to fulfill human rights that were imperiled during the convoy occupation, such as equality and non-discrimination, physical and mental health, access to health care, mobility and access to transportation, adequate housing, food, and rights to work, earn a livelihood and maintain an adequate standard of living. Programs and services provided by the federal, provincial and municipal governments in these areas are rarely designed and delivered from an explicit human rights perspective, and are characterized by confusing overlaps and gaps in jurisdiction.

This lack of coordination among the different orders of government within Canadian federalism is a longstanding concern with respect to effective human rights protection. Indigenous Peoples' organizations, civil society groups, parliamentary committees and United Nations human rights bodies have, for many years, repeatedly called on federal, provincial and territorial governments to improve their mechanisms for cooperation and collaboration, and to formalize and strengthen the role and responsibilities of municipal governments, when it comes to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights across Canada.³⁷

³⁶ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 1, p. 248.

³⁷ Alex Neve, *Closing the Implementation Gap: Federalism and Respect for International Human Rights in Canada*, Centre of Excellence on the Canadian Federation, Institute for Research in Public Policy, 2023, forthcoming.

What We've Learned And What Needs To Change

NEW MODELS OF LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We have referred several times to the pervasive feeling of abandonment that was shared with us repeatedly throughout the People's Commission process. Many people were as distressed by the stunning level of abandonment they experienced on the part of governments and police as they were by the harm they experienced at the hands of convoy participants. It was painful and even traumatizing to be subject to those human rights abuses. It was upsetting and disorienting to then realize officials were not inclined or prepared to protect them from those abuses.

As such, a common observation from many who appeared before or made submissions to OPC was one of crushing disappointment about what was often described as a stunning failure, or even a complete absence, of leadership on the part of civic and police officials throughout the convoy occupation – and a disturbing culture of off-loading responsibility and evading accountability.

ABSENCE OF LEADERSHIP

The concern about abandonment is much more profound than simply disagreeing with decisions that were made or policies that were adopted, or a belief that there was perhaps a regrettable and inexplicable lapse of judgement that resulted in abandonment in this one exceptional situation. Rather it clearly

reflects a sense of growing disenchantment among many members of the community with respect to political leadership in the city, and a feeling that many leaders are resistant to change and increasingly detached from the communities they serve and represent, disconnected even at a time of crisis. For many people this builds on serious concerns that have been mounting over time, long before the convoy arrived in the city.

Most significantly these critiques were made of the municipal and provincial governments, with many people referring directly to Ottawa's former mayor Jim Watson and Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Notably, the Public Order Emergency Commission's final report contains a chapter reflecting on "Ontario's Absence" noting that a theme that "emerged during the Inquiry was the view that the Government of Ontario was not fully engaged in responding to the protests" and that "[m]any witnesses saw the Province as trying to avoid responsibility for responding to a crisis within its borders."³⁸

We readily acknowledge that government and police were faced with a challenging situation and that because of early failures of intelligence and preparedness, and ill-informed strategic choices that allowed the convoy to get an entrenched foothold in the downtown core, options for resolving the situation were not necessarily obvious and straightforward. But that should not have resulted in or in any way excused the very clear abandonment communities experienced.

³⁸ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 1, p. 61.

As noted in the previous section discussing the need for an effective human rights framework, in a situation of this nature, governments should act quickly to acknowledge their duty to protect human rights and assure the public those rights will be protected. There should have been clear messages conveyed to the community that the human rights abuses people were experiencing were noted and understood, and that short-term and longer-term steps were being taken to mitigate the impact of those abuses and bring them to an end as soon as possible. Critical to the success of those efforts should have been regular and reliable communication providing residents and business owners with the information they needed to assess the evolving and volatile risks they were facing and make informed decisions about their own particular circumstances.

The degree to which governments did not recognize this was a human rights crisis and respond with the leadership required by a crisis of that nature, is well evidenced by the degree to which they abdicated their own responsibility to take charge and make decisions. At city level, responsibility was clearly left in the hands of the Ottawa police. Advice from City staff was ignored. City Councillors who pressed for a more proactive response were stonewalled and shut down. The provincial government was missing in action. And there was little if anything heard from federal ministers who lead departments responsible for the programs and services most closely tied to the human rights abuses people were experiencing.

Also notable is the fact that in the convoy's aftermath there has been no official apology to the residents and businesses of central Ottawa who experienced human rights abuses during the convoy occupation. No leaders have acknowledged, let alone assumed responsibility for their failure to protect human rights.

ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT

The City of Ottawa ceded all leadership and responsibility for the convoy to the OPS. Even after that first weekend when it became apparent the nature and duration of the protest had been misjudged, the Mayor, the Council and the City's Emergency Operations Centre Control Group failed to assume their respective roles in protecting the health, safety and human rights of vulnerable residents.

The failure to assume their responsibilities, the delay in declaring an emergency, and the deference to police with their sole focus on public order left a void that allowed the harms at community level to persist and worsen. Had Council met more often and had the Mayor and senior staff been required to report to Council on their handling of the social and economic dimensions of the crisis, a more rapid and robust response would almost certainly have taken shape.

The City's response was further complicated because the OPS does not report to Council but rather to the Ottawa Police Services Board, a body that proved itself ill-prepared for its role. As documented by the POEC, the Board was not clear about its authority or responsibility to oversee the police response and ensure it was addressing the community's needs.³⁹ Deflected by a fog of confusion about the "operational independence" of police and concerned about tying up OPS resources during a time of crisis, the Board failed to effectively exercise its oversight role. It wrongly accepted Police Chief Sloly's assertion that it would be "unlawful" to provide the operational plan to the Board, and that were he required to provide it, it would perform be a "heavily redacted document."⁴⁰ Similarly, the Board did not challenge the logic that the Police Chief was too busy dealing with the crisis to meet with the body that has the legislated mandate and duty to oversee police services, yet found time to meet with crisis communications advisors from Navigator.

³⁹ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 2, p. 268.

⁴⁰ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 3, p. 188.

Oversight should not be seen as a burden, a distraction or a sideshow. It is integral to legitimacy, credibility and accountability and works to ensure public decision-making is in the public interest. Council collectively has a responsibility to protect the interests of the citizens of Ottawa, and must be convened and have the information required to play its role. The Ottawa Police Services Board, an appointed body, needs the representation, training, support and transparency to effectively fulfil its vital responsibilities. Both the POEC and the Audits conducted by the City's Auditor General illustrate gaping shortcomings in the conduct and capacity of both bodies in responding to the convoy occupation. Urgent and substantive action is required in both instances to rebuild public trust.

THE CONVOY, GENDER AND DIVERSITY

A number of people described to us the many ways in which gender centrally influenced both the nature of the convoy, and perceptions of and responses to the convoy occupation by government and police. Both in its messages and its conduct, the convoy had an aggressively male tone, and a propensity for and tolerance of violent tactics. Many of the convoy's organizers and supporters, and certainly much of the ideology underpinning the convoy, had links to male-dominated white supremacist and far right groups.

OPC witnesses, as well as other public commentators, have drawn comparisons between the convoy experience and the realities of gender-based violence in society. In both instances, victims of the violence are often blamed for what happened to them – you went to the bar, you were flirtatious, you live in downtown Ottawa, you wore a mask – or what happened to them is minimized – it just got a bit carried away, there was no sexual intercourse, you were not beaten, protests are disruptive and inconvenient. In both instances, police and government officials have excuses for their failure to take action: he is sorry, the children need their father, protesters' rights must be upheld, we don't want to inflame the situation. The individuals or the community experiencing the violence are often gaslighted about their experience, made to

believe that it is their fault, was not so bad, or cannot be controlled. In both instances, a very gendered experience.

Undeniably, most of the key leaders with responsibility for addressing the situation, within government and police forces, were males, mostly white males, including the mayor, premier and prime minister, most relevant ministers and, with the exception of the Commissioner of the RCMP, all police chiefs and most senior police leaders. Clearly exasperated by comments made by officials who asserted, eleven days into the convoy occupation, that the situation was becoming safer, Centretown Councillor Catherine McKenney stated in an Ottawa City Council meeting: "I can tell you it's not safer out there. Only a man would say that today."⁴¹

DISTRUST AND POLITICAL AGENDAS

It was not simply ill-conceived decisions by officials that led to the feelings of abandonment. Residents and business owners were acutely aware the neglect stemmed from intentional choices and decisions made by officials. In particular, there was growing disquiet that support was deliberately withheld from community level initiatives responding to the convoy.

Lawyers at Champ & Associates were working against considerable odds to seek a court injunction against the physical harm and psychological torment of the blaring truck horns. But instead of support and ideally collaboration, the legal team felt undermined and left hanging by the City, and were not even informed of the City's own subsequent injunction application one week after the successful community effort.

When community members rallied on February 13 to mount a peaceful protest against a new wave of vehicles entering the city to join the convoy downtown, at what has become known as the Battle of Billings Bridge, they were not supported by police but instead felt as if they were being viewed as troublemakers whose actions were being equated with those of convoy participants.

⁴¹ *Ottawa Police chief asks for an additional 1,800 police and civilian staff to manage convoy*, Capital Current, 2022 <https://capitalcurrent.ca/ottawa-police-chief-asks-for-an-additional-1800-police-and-civilian-staff-to-manage-convoy/>.

Many residents, particularly those who engage regularly in community-level activism, indicated this is in keeping with an increasing pattern in recent years whereby groups and individuals involved in community-level initiatives to address racism, homelessness, Indigenous rights, climate justice and other pressing social issues are dismissed, ignored, or even targeted for insults and threats. In many respects, that trend tracks the rise of outspoken community groups and coalitions such as Horizon Ottawa, the Justice for Abdirahman Coalition, the City for All Women Initiative, and ACORN; groups actively campaigning in support of transformative change to advance social justice, anti-racism and environmental protection in the city. Activists involved in those and similar groups, increasingly describe a sense of resentment and distrust from many municipal officials.

There were many ways in which the politics of resentment usurped responsible and responsive leadership during the convoy. Grievances, grudges and even political vendettas seemed to fuel many of the decisions taken by Ottawa's mayor at the time, Jim Watson. More widely within Ottawa City Council, there appeared to be a willingness to pit urban and suburban communities, and voters, against each other. Ontario Premier Doug Ford made it abundantly clear, whether from disinterest or a politically motivated unwillingness to be seen as directly critical of the convoy, that he was not inclined to take action to protect residents and businesses in Ottawa from the human rights abuses they were experiencing. And a number of politicians, including several senior Conservative Members of Parliament, were much more likely to express enthusiastic support for the convoy, and pose for photographs with organizers and supporters, than to criticize them for the violence and human rights abuses they were committing.

One of the most troubling instances of distrust arises from reports that emerged during the convoy occupation as well as in testimony before the POEC from Keith Wilson, one of the convoy's key lawyers, alleging that current or former members of police forces were providing information about police enforcement strategies to convoy organizers.⁴² As one resident told us, "what more did we need as proof that for some police officers, the well-being of the community was clearly not a top concern."

There are reports that OPS is conducting an internal investigation into these allegations but the Ontario Provincial Police are not.⁴³

RESPECT FOR INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

We have highlighted throughout this report the many ways that convoy organizers and participants failed to respect Indigenous Peoples and, in particular, disregarded local First Nations leaders, elders and protocols, and disrespected and appropriated sacred objects and ceremonies. It is also clear that police and governments failed to properly consult with Indigenous communities regarding a range of crucial decisions related to their response to the convoy occupation. As one local First Nations leader indicated to us, police reached out to leaders and elders when they needed specific advice or help, but not proactively to keep them informed or seek their input into decisions. The POEC has also noted this concern, indicating that while there may have been "broad and ongoing conversations" and "routine contact" between the federal government and Indigenous leaders during the convoy occupation, there were no specific consultations about the crucial decision to invoke the *Emergencies Act*.⁴⁴ These were decisions being taken about very consequential police actions within the unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.

⁴² Public Order Emergency Commission, *Public Hearing Transcript Volume 15 - 15 November 2022*, p. 80.

⁴³ Canadian Press, *Ottawa police investigating allegations of officers leaking info to 'Freedom Convoy'*, CTV News, 3 November, 2022, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/ottawa-police-investigating-allegations-of-officers-leaking-info-to-freedom-convoy-1.6138525>

⁴⁴ Public Order Emergency Commission, *Report of the Public Inquiry into the 2022 Public Order Emergency*, Vol. 3, p. 101-102.

What We've Learned And What Needs To Change

IMPROVING RESPONSIVENESS TO CRISES

Much of what we heard and read over the course of OPC's proceedings amounts to a catalogue of steps that were not taken, policies that were only partially activated, and measures that were patently inadequate, in the face of what had become a full-blown human rights crisis. Residents, workers and members of the business community shared a range of recommendations which from their perspective, having experienced the convoy's impact firsthand, would improve responsiveness to crises of this nature going forward.

Downtown residents and businesses were clear that telling people to avoid downtown is not an adequate response to an emergency — and undermines efforts to build a vibrant and welcoming core. They called for laws and by-laws to be equitably applied and enforced. People who were vulnerable and needing support spoke to the need for something akin to 'humanitarian corridors' assuring access to essential goods, services and support. Others recommended public health nurses and community allies go door-to-door, conducting wellness checks and identifying households at risk. Respite centres outside the affected zone could offer refuge from the noise and fumes. Communication could be improved by working with community associations, BIAs, service groups and faith communities to get word to diverse populations on emergency measures and available assistance. Business leaders called on the City to distinguish among protests, occupations and events,

assuring equitable application of protocols and requirements for each. Everyone agreed vehicles may have a place in parades but should be restricted at protests — and that local residents and businesses can't be cut off and stranded behind barricaded streets. They called for an 'all-of-City' response to risk assessment and crisis management, overcoming silos and deflected responsibilities, bringing together not only all municipal authorities but also community members and organizations, as well as provincial and federal authorities. All of these recommendations point to the huge benefit of local residents from diverse backgrounds playing an active role in helping the City plan and execute its emergency response.

The concerns about the ineffective government and police response to the convoy occupation, from the community's point of view, fall within the following five broad areas.

POOR COMMUNICATION

In the midst of a complex, volatile and rapidly evolving crisis situation, involving an aggressive and violent occupation which had turned life upside down and was causing serious human rights abuses for thousands of residents, workers and business owners, a reliable, regular flow of detailed, meaningful information to the community should have been a top priority. Given the range of police forces involved and the implication of all three orders of government, that information flow should have been well coordinated so that it was compiled and readily accessible in one place.

That was far from the case. Rather, information flow was not well coordinated, was sporadic and unpredictable, was not timely, and did not provide the detail people needed to make informed decisions about their safety, well-being and business operations. People were left instead relying on social media channels, news reports, and informal networks and word of mouth.

UNCLEAR ENFORCEMENT POLICIES

The people of central Ottawa were ensnared in a situation replete with ongoing serious criminal acts and a staggering level of disregard for city bylaws dealing with parking, noise, idling, and public safety. At a time when residents and business owners needed reliability and predictability about plans to enforce those laws, there was anything but. The prevailing response from officials was that enforcement action was not being taken until further orders were given, out of concern that arresting or ticketing convoy participants risked provoking a violent response. Former City Councillor Mathieu Fleury told us he was being told that police were awaiting orders. The City of Ottawa's General Manager of Emergency and Protective Services told the city's Audit Committee that "any point of contact could ignite riots, deaths or burning buildings."⁴⁵

Regardless of whether that concern was justified, there remains a raft of crucial, unanswered questions. Was a formal policy decision taken or was it rumour and conjecture based on people's experience when they sought to make complaints to police or bylaw? If it was an official decision, what was the legal basis for deciding not to enforce the law? Did it truly mean no enforcement action of any kind, no matter how serious the offence? What discretion rested with individual officers? Would the moratorium continue indefinitely? Had there been consideration of ways in which police could provide protection and support to bylaw officers?

Notably there had been no consultation with or input from community members, either before or during the convoy occupation, about the enforcement of laws designed to ensure their safety and well-being.

FAILURE TO MONITOR AND RESPOND TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

As we have indicated throughout both Part I and Part II of our report, essential programs and services were in many cases suspended or scaled back during the convoy occupation, which led to or exacerbated human rights abuses experienced by residents. It should be noted that for many, the convoy occupation represented an acute crisis atop an ongoing crisis rooted in poverty, ill health, homelessness or other challenges, made worse by the pandemic. That meant many people were already at risk, with few reserves to tap or resources to fall back on.

One very common experience during the occupation, especially for people with disabilities, elderly people, people facing mental health challenges, and people feeling particularly vulnerable to being threatened, accosted or subjected to hate by convoy participants, was not being able to go outside their home, even to just go a few blocks to a nearby store. They described it as akin to becoming prisoners in their own homes. That sense of imprisonment came about through the combination of a pervasive sense of fear, intimidation and uncertainty arising from the lawlessness unfolding on the streets of their community, alongside dramatically restricted mobility due to suspended transit services and the congestion from trucks blockading downtown streets. For the homeless, it resulted in them being displaced or going to ground and lying low.

What was the response from police and government officials to that reality of seclusion and isolation? People were essentially abandoned at precisely the time when they needed support. We asked community members, especially those facing the greatest vulnerability during the convoy occupation, if they

⁴⁵ Ottawa Auditor General, *Audit of the City of Ottawa's Response to the Convoy Protest*, 17 February 2023 p. 10.

had been contacted or if there had been an effort by officials to check in more widely with people living in their apartment or condominium building. We asked about the role and presence of community police officers, some of whom had well established relationships with community representatives and social service organizations working with vulnerable community members.

Almost without exception, people told us they had no knowledge of City officials or police proactively checking in about the safety and well-being of community members. People who have positive and much appreciated connections to community police officers said they had been told those officers had been redeployed to focus on enforcement on Wellington Street, although they had not received any official communication about that. More widely, there was no effort by police or other officials to gather information about the human rights abuses people were experiencing and seek community input as to measures that could help mitigate the impact of those abuses. Community members turned to each other for assistance, or relied on overstretched and scaled back community agencies, whose staff and volunteers – many of whom are women, new Canadians, racialized or stigmatized and, as a result, themselves doubly vulnerable – were also coping with the disruption and human rights abuses associated with the convoy.

Notably the City did not provide additional funding to community partners to support the surge in demand for food, comfort and services, nor did it put in place a coherent and concerted plan to assure frontline workers were safe, respected and enabled to do their jobs in reaching vulnerable residents. And in the aftermath of the occupation, there was no plan set in place to support post-incident follow up.

Ottawa's response to the pandemic demonstrated the city has a robust network of community volunteers, organizations and agencies with the ability to be nimble and flexible, delivering innovative programs that respond effectively to a diverse range

of community needs, even in times of crisis. The City failed to effectively leverage this social infrastructure in its response to the convoy occupation.

FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT THE CITY'S EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Time and time again, residents of central Ottawa described the frustration and disbelief they felt about the city's inability to provide a community-focused response to this crisis. People frequently referenced recent responses to other devastating emergencies, including extreme weather events and extensive flooding, which appeared to be better coordinated, provided a better flow of information, and were much more attentive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable community members. As one example, in the case of the tornado that touched down in September 2018, devastating the Dunrobin area, the City established a command centre within hours and went door to door through the affected areas checking on residents within 24 hours.

In her audit of the City's response to the convoy protest, the City of Ottawa's Auditor General looks closely at how well the City's Emergency Management Program (EMP) was implemented and followed. The audit points to many serious shortcomings, beginning with the failure of OPS to identify the City's Office of Emergency Management as a "prime partner" during the initial phases of planning for the convoy protest.⁴⁶ The audit describes the City's failure to pivot from the emergency response to the COVID pandemic to the new reality of the convoy protest and the fact that, "the population of 'at-risk / vulnerable' people' changed as all residents living in the downtown core, especially within the red-zone, were facing a challenging situation and some may have struggled to meet their basic needs. The EOC [Emergency Operations Centre] did not reassess to identify the vulnerable population specific to this emergency, in order to understand what additional outreach and support may have been needed."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

The audit further notes that the EMP requires that, during an emergency, “the City coordinate a framework within which arrangements and measures are implemented to ensure that basic needs are met for people impacted by a situation.” That meant “the City had a responsibility to ensure that help was made available and was adequately promoted to all residents that found themselves in need during the emergency.” The audit notes that the City did, “contemplate different ways to help residents, such as respite centres and wellness checks.” However, the audit concludes that those supports were “ultimately not provided due to a variety of reasons including: lack of demand for the service, inability of residents to access the service and coverage by other organizations such as community partners.”⁴⁸

Once again, a central concern was an inadequate flow of information. The Auditor General found that while the City created a process to assist impacted residents with access to basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, medication delivery), the means of accessing this support was not adequately advertised to some residents affected by the emergency.⁴⁹

IT IS NOT OVER

For residents of central Ottawa there is a feeling that officials are of the view that concerns about the convoy occupation came to an end when the last truck rolled out of the city over one year ago. There have been bursts of activity every time another convoy-related protest or event is announced or rumoured, with police keen to demonstrate they have learned lessons and are prepared to take more pre-emptive enforcement action to forestall another occupation. There has also been considerable engagement on the part of officials in the formal reviews that have been conducted, such as the POEC.

But there has been very little acknowledgement of and response to the fact that for the people who went through it, the convoy's impact is far from over.

People testified to us about the ongoing trauma and other mental health challenges they continue to face, many months after the convoy. Their fear and stress about a repeat of that experience is easily triggered, simply by hearing a horn or seeing a flag on a passing truck. Some people have been able to pursue counseling to assist in their recovery, but many others cannot access or afford that option. People told us they are still feeling the effect of financial losses associated with the convoy occupation, be that from lost wages or extra expenses they incurred in an attempt to cope with the convoy's disruptive impact. There is no program to provide redress to residents and workers.

Very significantly, people made it clear to us time and again, that their faith in government and police was shattered by what they went through, and they have not seen any recognition of that reality from officials nor any effort to restore and rebuild the community's confidence. On the contrary, they cite disturbing examples of reduced access and restricted participation as they advocate for greater accountability before the Ottawa Police Services Board and they worry that the OPS may have drawn the wrong lessons from the debacle of the convoy occupation. As well, they note that while there were high barriers to overcome to lodge a complaint with the OPS during the convoy occupation, most are still awaiting any evidence of follow up.

The response of police and government to the rights and needs of the community during the convoy was lacking in many important respects. The response since the occupation ended has been non-existent.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 18-19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

What We've Learned And What Needs To Change

FOSTERING DIALOGUE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

It is simply not possible to emerge from an experience like the convoy occupation with anything other than deep concern about how fractured and polarized the space for fostering dialogue and building community among people of differing backgrounds and opposing views has become; not only in Ottawa and not only in Canada, but worldwide.

Facilitating constructive conversations and encouraging understanding and respect across groups and individuals who disagree with each other – sometimes sharply – has never been easy. While such things cannot likely be objectively measured, there is a widely held feeling that those divisions and fissures are deeper and wider than ever and have most certainly been exacerbated by misinformation and disinformation, and by social tensions that flared over the course of the pandemic. While those are enormous challenges and concerns extending far beyond OPC's mandate and capacity, there is no question that it was a constant in what we heard throughout testimony, community consultations and submissions.

Certainly that was a dominant sentiment shared by people who were traumatized and harmed by the convoy, yet felt their concerns and experiences were mischaracterized, disregarded and trivialized at the time. They were taunted and accosted in the street simply because they were wearing a mask, in keeping with COVID protocols recommended

by public health officials. They were derided for raising concerns about the impact of the convoy by organizers, participants and various commentators who painted them as complaining about seemingly trivial inconveniences and nuisances that they should simply expect to cope with in a national capital where protests frequently take place. And they felt gaslighted by police who made frequent references to the convoy protests as being "mainly peaceful" in sharp contrast to their lived experience.

Not only did residents and business owners feel ignored and overlooked during the convoy, that perception has continued in the months that have followed. Many people described to the People's Commission that they felt the official reviews – the Public Order Emergency Commission, the parliamentary Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, and the City of Ottawa's Auditor General – had only minimal space to canvas the community's experience of the convoy. In our proceedings, we heard frequent references to how few witnesses from the community were called, and how little time they were allotted, at the POEC, in comparison to the many days of testimony afforded to convoy organizers and participants. It left them feeling their views did not matter.

That sense of being ignored is reflected as well in the fact that no programs have been instituted by any order of government to provide compensation and redress for the harms endured and expenses incurred by community members because of the convoy. Business owners have, to some extent, been compensated for their losses. Most workers, unless

they were fortunate to have an employer who was able to keep paying them even while the business was shut, lost wages and quite likely received only minimal if any Employment Insurance. And there is nothing available to residents for the costs they had to shoulder in an attempt to cope with what they were going through, let alone to provide redress for the physical and psychological harm they suffered.

Very striking was the number of people who expressed concern to us about how hate, racism and discrimination, often promoted by individuals and organizations with direct or shadowy links to white supremacist and far right groups, was given so much space during the convoy occupation but seemed to be minimized by organizers and even by some officials. Such incidents, such as the display of racist flags, were often dismissed as the actions of individuals not reflective of the convoy's goals or messages. Yet there were no signs of action by convoy organizers to condemn such acts and make it clear such views would not be tolerated. Police rarely commented about the hateful and racist side of the convoy; and while a number of politicians did condemn it unequivocally, most paid it little attention while others enthusiastically posed for photographs with some of the purveyors of those hateful messages.

In some cases, this lack of regard for the gravity of the displays of hate and racism that were so prevalent in the convoy may have reflected support for those views or a desire to court political support from its proponents. In other cases, reflective of white privilege, it was an inability or unwillingness to see how real and harmful those views and symbols were. And for some people it represented a view that protest rights, and in particular freedom of expression, are always paramount, even when what is being expressed is hateful and racist.

The bottom line is that for many, overt symbols as well as a pervasive atmosphere of menacing hate were ever present, but they felt that was rarely acknowledged as a central concern by police and government officials, who were more inclined to focus on the security of Parliament, traffic concerns

and cross border trade. People readily acknowledge those are critical imperatives, but were distressed that hate and racism were of lesser concern.

It is because community members felt their experience was largely being overlooked that the decision was made, within the community, to establish the People's Commission. It was striking to the Commissioners how often, and frequently with considerable emotion, people who appeared before us highlighted how the mere opportunity to come forward and share their experience was validating and, for some people, even therapeutic. They told us they finally felt heard and welcomed the acknowledgement of their experience. In many ways the People's Commission mattered for that reason alone.

Notably, the convoy supporters who testified at or made submissions to OPC also spoke emotionally about feeling overlooked, ignored and shunned, although in a very different context and for very different reasons. In fact, their context and reasons were essentially the complete opposite from what we heard from others, even if some of the emotion was similar.

Convoy supporters described having made choices during the pandemic about vaccines, masking and other COVID public health mandates. They made those choices for a range of personal reasons, generally related to their own health situation, their convictions or their political views. They told us they had felt vilified and misunderstood, including by family, friends, neighbours and coworkers, and that there were no spaces available to them during the two years of COVID leading up to the convoy, in which they could have had a constructive conversation or exchange about their choices without it degenerating into accusations and insults.

We would note that OPC itself has been the recipient of a number of hateful messages, some directed through our website, some through social media. And we are mindful that many community members told us they were still too fearful to come forward to share their stories, concerned they would be targeted and doxed.

We are of course cognizant that none of these observations are by any means novel. The extent to which society is becoming more divisive and polarized, debates more toxic, and the ability and willingness to listen to and hear each other diminishing, has been studied and reported extensively. The role played by social media and disinformation is often highlighted, fueled by the extent to which people receive their news and engage in debate within echo chambers of other people with similar outlooks. These concerns are thoroughly canvased, for instance, in the report from a recent inquiry conducted by the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner in British Columbia:

While hate is not new, the pandemic marks a period in our collective experience that has been filled with fear, mistrust, division and hate. It has challenged the institutions designed to keep us safe and uphold the rule of law and democracy. It is a period marked not just by hate based on race or religion, but also hate directed at homeless people, women, migrant workers, health communicators, politicians and so many more. It is a period where we have seen the voices of those who have been targeted for online hate increasingly silenced.⁵⁰

Delving into this more fully is outside of our scope. But it cannot be ignored. We are aware that many thoughtful recommendations have been made to governments and, more to the point, to all of us, as to what needs to be done to understand, acknowledge and address the rising hate in society. Crucially, that must include comprehensive responses, beyond limited and piecemeal actions. BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, for example, has called on the BC government to produce a "whole-of-government strategy and action plan on addressing hate".⁵¹

⁵⁰ British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, *From hate to hope: Report of the Inquiry into hate in the COVID-19 pandemic*, March 2023, p. 1, https://bchumanrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/From-hate-to-hope_Inquiry-report-executive-summary_English.pdf.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Recommendations

The People's Commission has heard from affected residents, workers and businesses that their experience of the convoy protests that laid siege to Ottawa's downtown neighbourhoods was one of occupation, violence and abandonment. In response to that threat — absent protective action and assistance from governments at all levels — the community mobilized to meet their needs and defend their rights. One element of that response is the Ottawa People's Commission.

After reviewing the experience and considering the recommendations of more than 200 people and organizations, OPC concludes the debacle of the convoy occupation can be attributed to the absence of a commitment to human rights, an absence of leadership, an absence of responsiveness to the community and its diverse needs, and an absence of dialogue and community building.

While there are those who suggest the community should "move on" and "get over it", OPC believes it is essential and urgent that the City of Ottawa and other governments provide a substantive — indeed transformative — response, acknowledging the failures, redressing the harms and taking actions that build assurance that the shambolic response to the convoy occupation will never be repeated.

In weighing which recommendations might be most powerful, OPC was mindful of its mandate to focus on the impact of the convoy occupation on the community. But we recognize the occupation constituted an acute crisis on top of ongoing emergencies arising from high levels of homelessness, large numbers of vulnerable residents,

a community struggling to control a pandemic, and an emboldened far-right that advocates white supremacy, hate and intolerance.

Many of these issues require a systemic response.

The majority of recommendations are directed to City Hall, where dramatic, substantive change is urgently needed. Others relate to the Province and federal government, or require the cooperation of all three levels of government.

Some recommendations require immediate action. Others will take more time and more active engagement with residents, community organizations and agencies, and local business leaders to ensure the response meets the community's diverse needs. In each instance, we have recommended a timeframe for follow up action.

OPC received hundreds of suggested recommendations: some specific and granular, others systemic. We have not tried to capture them all here but rather to recommend places or processes where these more detailed or far-reaching recommendations can be vetted and debated.

OPC encourages Ottawa residents, community organizations, elected representatives and others to embrace these recommendations, or advance more effective alternatives, taking up the challenge of advocating for an ambitious human rights agenda, a culture of transformative leadership, a commitment to responsiveness, and a more inclusive and community-building approach to dialogue and democratic action.

After the trauma and disruption of the convoy occupation, Ottawa residents need and deserve fundamental change at City Hall – with cooperation from other levels of government – and a major investment in social infrastructure and community-building to ensure the events of February 2022 are never repeated and be better prepared to deal with all manner of emergency in the future.

EARN TRUST

The City of Ottawa has lost the trust of local residents, having abandoned them during the convoy occupation. Public confidence in the commitment, capacity and competence of the City and local authorities to respect rights and protect health and well-being in a time of crisis has been decimated.

A healthy, diverse and peaceful city relies upon the mutual respect and trust of residents and City officials. To earn residents' trust requires an admission by those officials of the harm they caused through their actions and their failure to act during the occupation, an expression of sincere regret, a recognition of their accountability to the people of Ottawa and to the protection and implementation of human rights, and the adoption of effective measures to redress wrongs and prevent such occurrences in future.

Recommendation 1: Convene town halls

The City of Ottawa should convene town halls in the neighbourhoods in central Ottawa most impacted by the convoy occupation, providing an opportunity for officials to hear firsthand about the concerns and experiences of those who were directly affected, with a view to informing and confirming remedial action and redress.

Recommendation 2: Provide meaningful apologies

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario, and the federal government must all offer meaningful apologies to the people of Ottawa for failing to protect their rights during the convoy occupation. Those apologies should:

1. demonstrate a full understanding of the human rights abuses experienced by residents, workers and business owners;
2. acknowledge that as governments they are accountable to protect people from those human rights abuses and that they failed to meet that obligation; and
3. commit to enacting comprehensive reforms, with broad community input and regular public reporting, to address the causes and consequences of this human rights failure.

Recommendation 3: Redress harms

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should collectively ensure that affected residents, workers and business owners receive full redress for the human rights harms they experienced during the convoy occupation, including:

1. reparations for human rights abuses and violations;
2. compensation for expenses, lost wages and income, business losses and other financial costs incurred as a result of the convoy occupation; and
3. provision of counseling and other health services to address trauma, mental health needs or other health challenges arising from the convoy occupation.

Recommendation 4: Build credibility and collaboration

As a confidence building measure, to demonstrate goodwill and begin to address issues that arose during the convoy occupation, the City of Ottawa should:

1. work with concerned residents, community associations and partners to develop and pilot a transportation plan for Canada Day 2023 that assures reliable, accessible transit and Para Transpo services to residents and businesses within the exclusion zone;

2. work with construction site managers in the red zone to replace horn sounds that alert local residents and workers of imminent blasting with whistles or other sounds that do not trigger residents, workers or pets;
3. work with community associations to support innovative community safety initiatives and strengthen their capacity to provide effective participation and leadership in shaping and implementing Community Safety and Well-Being Plans;
4. work with community partners to develop more robust programs and protocols, with increased funding including surge funding as required, to assure continuous access and service to and for vulnerable persons and households in times of emergency; and
5. work with local businesses and community partners to promote downtown as a vital, vibrant place to live, work, shop and enjoy.

UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Everything about the convoy occupation, including how it was organized, the conduct of participants, and the actions taken by governments and police, represented a wholesale failure to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the city and, in particular, the rights of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people, who have never ceded or surrendered these lands. That disrespect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Ottawa/Gatineau is longstanding and endemic.

Recommendation 5: Commit to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario should each officially endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work collaboratively with Indigenous leaders and elders, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, to develop implementation plans for the Declaration in the city and for the province.

Recommendation 6: Respect Indigenous leadership in times of crisis

The City of Ottawa, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples' organizations, should develop a policy to ensure that the leadership of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people is acknowledged and respected, and the rights of Indigenous peoples are upheld and protected when the city is faced with emergencies similar to the convoy occupation.

Recommendation 7: Advance reconciliation

Community groups and organizations should invite local First Nations leaders and elders, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations in the Ottawa/Gatineau area, collaboratively to organize healing circles, ceremonies, and other gatherings and events, to acknowledge truth, promote reconciliation, strengthen regard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and foster greater respect and understanding within and among communities in the region.

PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

The convoy occupation exposed the lack of effective standards and institutional mechanisms at the local level to ensure protection of fundamental human rights for local residents including, but not limited to, the rights to non-discrimination, health care, adequate housing, security of the person, and to a livelihood.

Recommendation 8: Adopt a Human Rights Charter for Ottawa

The City of Ottawa should adopt a Human Rights Charter to better equip residents to hold the City to account for upholding human rights at all times, including during emergencies and crisis situations like the convoy occupation. The Human Rights Charter should:

1. be developed through a robust consultation process with a diverse range of residents and stakeholders, in particular from groups requiring human rights protections;

2. explicitly recognize the vulnerability of particular groups to discrimination, violence, and socio-economic disadvantage, particularly during crises, including Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, racialized individuals, seniors, youth and persons living in homelessness;
3. be grounded in the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and international human rights obligations binding on the City such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
4. apply to all aspects of municipal affairs, including drafting and interpreting bylaws, setting policies and priorities, formulating budgets, and decision-making by all municipal departments and agencies;
5. include a Human Rights Action Plan for the City with resource commitments, benchmarks, timelines and annual public reporting on progress, that is revised and updated annually; and
6. be enforced by an independent municipal human rights commission or other mechanism through which residents can bring complaints of non-compliance with the Human Rights Charter and seek resolution or a remedy.

Recommendation 9: Amend provincial legislation to strengthen human rights protection

The Province of Ontario should amend the Municipal Act to require municipalities to prioritize compliance with their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and amend the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act to require that municipal emergency response plans identify and give priority to the human rights of vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 10: Protect journalists

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should work with media organizations to develop measures that will ensure journalists are safe and media freedom is respected during crises like the convoy occupation. Those measures should focus on the elevated risks faced by female, racialized and Indigenous journalists.

PRIORITIZE SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

During the occupation, the City of Ottawa failed to proactively reach out to vulnerable individuals and households to ensure they were safe and that their fundamental rights such as to food, health care, adequate housing, and to a livelihood were being met. At the same time, life-saving and essential services were suspended and inaccessible to disadvantaged groups, contributing to the violation of their human rights.

Recommendation 11: Develop a city-wide “needs map”

The City of Ottawa, led by Ottawa Public Health and Ottawa Fire Services, should develop a city-wide “needs map” that identifies communities, neighbourhoods and households that might be particularly vulnerable at a time of crisis considering factors such as income, disability, age, race, religion and gender-identity. This map should also include the location and reach of all social and health services relied upon by disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 12: Develop crisis outreach plans

The City of Ottawa must develop outreach plans to ensure that in times of crisis vulnerable households are reached and their fundamental human rights to, for example, food, adequate housing, transportation, health care, non-discrimination and education, are protected.

Recommendation 13: Ensure access to essential services

The City of Ottawa must develop plans to ensure essential and lifesaving services remain open and accessible at all times, including during times of crisis. This includes public transit, Para Transpo, drop-in centres, food programs, homeless and emergency shelters, and homeless outreach and harm-reduction services. The City of Ottawa must ensure staff and community partners operating these services have the necessary resources and protections needed due to the circumstances of any particular crisis.

KEEP THE COMMUNITY SAFE

Never again can communities in Ottawa be left to endure violence and other harms as they did during the convoy occupation, with inadequate effort by governments and police to keep them safe and uphold their human rights.

Recommendation 14: Develop a policy on protest and community impact

The City of Ottawa must develop a comprehensive policy, backed up by regular training, with respect to the management of protests which includes strong protections for the right to protest as well as for the rights of individuals in communities impacted by protest, with a focus on the human rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community.

Recommendation 15: Strengthen police oversight

The Province of Ontario should launch public consultations towards strengthened police oversight in the city, including reforms to the Ottawa Police Services Board, to improve accessibility, accountability and responsiveness to communities and the public. Regulations should be adopted to ensure timely investigations and responses within 120 days to all complaints about police misconduct.

Recommendation 16: Investigate the failure to protect residents

The City of Ottawa should appoint an independent investigator to examine and report on:

1. allegations that current or former police officers may have provided intelligence, enforcement and other operational information to convoy organizers;
2. the decision of the Ottawa Police Service to refrain from criminal enforcement action against convoy participants prior to invocation of the Emergencies Act;
3. the failure of the Ottawa Police Service to respond to complaints from residents during the occupation; and
4. the decision to refrain from bylaw enforcement during the convoy occupation, including because of security risks faced by bylaw officers and concerns that ticketing might have aggravated the situation.

Recommendation 17: Increase funding for community safety and well-being

The City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario should reduce or reallocate policing budgets so as to provide greater resources to social services, community safety programs, anti-racism and gender equality initiatives, mental health services, income support, provision of housing, harm reduction initiatives, transit services and other programs designed to enhance human rights protection.

STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The City of Ottawa did not manage the emergency caused by the convoy occupation effectively. They failed to communicate basic information to the public, abandoned those needing socio-economic protections and did not ensure they had access to essential services, failed to coordinate a response to the occupation with other orders of government, and did not engage downtown residents and others affected to determine community needs and solutions.

Recommendation 18: Establish an Emergency Advisory Committee

The City of Ottawa should establish an Emergency Advisory Committee, composed of diverse residents in terms of age, ability, indigeneity, gender identity, race and socio-economic status, drawn from all parts of the city. From this Committee, a panel with strong representation from the affected area would be convened when the city, or any part, is faced with a crisis, with a mandate to provide input and advice to City officials and Ottawa Police Service with respect to the situation on the ground and measures they recommend be taken to ensure community safety and human rights protection.

Recommendation 19: Strengthen Ottawa's Emergency Management Program

The City of Ottawa should revise and strengthen its Emergency Management Program, including by:

1. revamping communication protocols for emergency situations to involve community representatives in assessing information needs, so as to ensure that meaningful and detailed information is provided to city residents and businesses through a variety of channels, including community partners, on a timely, frequent basis; and
2. incorporating clear recognition of the obligation to prioritize human rights protection in responding to emergencies through mechanisms

for monitoring human rights abuses, a process for assessing the human rights needs of residents, and detailed measures for preventing, mitigating and responding to human rights abuses.

Recommendation 20: Coordinate emergency response across all orders of government

The City of Ottawa should work with the Province of Ontario and the federal government to establish an office for more effectively coordinating responses to future crises like the convoy occupation, including a centralized and easily accessible emergency contact point for residents and business owners to report human rights abuses and access support.

ADDRESS HATE, BUILD COMMUNITY AND ADVANCE INCLUSION

Many Ottawa residents experienced hate, racism and discrimination at the hands of convoy participants. The impact of racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other hate and discrimination connected to the convoy was inherently violent and has left a devastating impact on residents. Despite the gravity of such hate crimes, it has remained largely unaddressed by officials.

Recommendation 21: Address hate

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should strengthen collaboration to identify individuals and groups promoting hate and violence across Canada and develop and implement a comprehensive, collective plan of action to:

1. prevent its further spread or manifestation, in person and online;
2. develop policies with respect to the display of flags, banners, posters and other materials that are inherently racist or convey messages of hate, discrimination and intolerance;

3. promote proactive efforts to foster diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, including strategies like bystander training and identifying and rewarding leadership that fosters understanding and cooperation; and
4. encourage curriculum development for schools on human rights, civic education and active citizenship.

Recommendation 22: Increase diversity among elected and senior municipal officials

The City of Ottawa should redouble its commitment and improve its performance in boosting gender, racial and all other forms of diversity, to increase equity, inclusion and accessibility within elected and senior levels of municipal government, as well as senior ranks of the Ottawa Police Service.

Recommendation 23: Support community initiatives

The City of Ottawa must increase its support to community safety and well-being by providing more robust financial support to community associations and organizations promoting inclusion, mutual support and solidarity. These organizations and associations should work collaboratively and collectively, through alliances like the Inner-City Working Group, the Federation of Community Associations, the Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas, OttawaCares, and others, to support initiatives to counter hate and division in the city and promote understanding, equity, justice and cooperation, including during times of crisis.

Recommendation 24: Create space for dialogue and community building

Community organizations, aided by foundations and other funding bodies, should consider supporting initiatives like People's Commissions and other similar processes and fora which provide opportunities for constructive dialogue around pressing social issues, with an eye to building understanding, forging solutions and advancing change.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABLE FOLLOW-UP

The experience of the convoy occupation has been traumatic and has shattered the confidence of thousands of Ottawa residents in their governments and police forces. Earning their trust requires a clear demonstration of accountability and transparency, and a commitment to following through on the changes required.

Recommendation 25: Consult publicly and report on implementation

The City of Ottawa, the province of Ontario and the federal government should consult with the public as they prepare plans for implementing recommendations from the Public Order Emergency Commission, the City of Ottawa's Auditor General's reviews and the Ottawa People's Commission, and report publicly every six months on progress on implementation and outcomes.

Timeline For Action

Central to building trust and confidence within the community in the aftermath of the convoy occupation is to demonstrate a meaningful commitment to change. Change comes through action, and action requires a timeline for it to be both feasible and genuine. We offer the following timeline for implementing the recommendations we have proposed. The timeline may evolve, but the target dates should be publicly accessible and regularly updated as required.

By June 30, 2023

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|--------------------|---|
| Recommendation 1: | Convene town halls |
| Recommendation 4: | Build credibility and collaboration |
| Recommendation 25: | Consult publicly and report on implementation |

By September 30, 2023

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| Recommendation 2: | Provide meaningful apologies |
| Recommendation 3: | Redress harms |
| Recommendation 5: | Commit to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples |

By December 31, 2023

- | | |
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| Recommendation 6: | Uphold Indigenous leadership in times of crisis |
| Recommendation 7: | Advance reconciliation |
| Recommendation 8: | Adopt a Human Rights Charter for Ottawa |
| Recommendation 13: | Ensure access to essential services |
| Recommendation 14: | Develop a policy on protest and community impact |
| Recommendation 15: | Strengthen police oversight |

Recommendation 16:	Investigate the failure to protect residents
Recommendation 17:	Increase funding for community safety and well-being
Recommendation 18:	Establish an Emergency Advisory Committee
Recommendation 19:	Strengthen Ottawa's Emergency Management Program
Recommendation 22:	Increase diversity in elected and senior municipal officials
Recommendation 23:	Support community initiatives

By March 31, 2024

Recommendation 9:	Amend provincial legislation to strengthen human rights protection
Recommendation 10:	Protect journalists
Recommendation 20:	Coordinate emergency response across all orders of government
Recommendation 21:	Address hate

By June 30, 2024

Recommendation 11:	Develop a city-wide "needs map"
Recommendation 12:	Develop crisis outreach plans
Recommendation 24:	Create space for dialogue and community building

Thanks

As a people's initiative we have relied enormously on people in all aspects of how our work has proceeded. That certainly includes the generous contributions of many members of the community who have served on our advisory committee, taken part in meetings of OPC's Inner-City Stakeholders Group, and volunteered to help with a host of tasks associated with our hearings, operations, and outreach. We have benefited from student interns, from the University of Ottawa and St. Thomas University, as well as the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, who have assisted with research. The Commissioners are grateful for all of those invaluable contributions, with particular gratitude for the tireless efforts of the two co-chairs of our advisory committee, Robert Fox and Brenda Knight.

We also want to acknowledge the singular contribution of Ken Rubin who was the spark that initiated this project and played such a pivotal role in getting it underway.

It would be an understatement to say that we succeeded in this journey in large part due to the exceptional talents and hard work of the small staff team that has supported the OPC. In truth, we would not have succeeded without them. We deeply appreciate everything that Gaëlle Muderer, Scott Mitchell, Rachel Carmichael Campbell and Stacy Okafor have done to support this endeavour.

While so much of the People's Commission has been driven by volunteers, there have been costs associated with this initiative as well, including for salaries, technical services, and interpretation and

translation. That in turn leads us to express thanks to the many donors who have made generous financial contributions in support of our work. We have been exceptionally fortunate to have gone forward as a program of the Centretown Community Health Centre and have benefited tremendously from the Centre's financial and institutional support, alongside enormous support from CCHC's Executive Director Michelle Hurtubise, Board of Directors and staff.

Finally, we cannot adequately express the respect and gratitude we feel for the many members of the community who participated directly in the People's Commission, by providing personal testimony in public hearings in person and online, joining in community consultations, meeting with us privately, and making written submissions. It is an understatement that conversations related to COVID-19, vaccine and masking protocols, and the convoy itself, have become contentious and polarizing. Individuals who have raised concerns – be that about the convoy or the nature of some of the right-wing groups associated with the convoy – have frequently been targeted publicly for vilification and threats. We heard directly about such experiences, including death threats and online doxing, from many of the people who testified or met with us.

It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that it was courageous for people to come forward and share their experiences; without which we would not have been able to compile the rich information that is at the heart of this report.

Appendix A

OPC GENESIS AND MANDATE

The Ottawa People's Commission on the Convoy Occupation (OPC) was launched in June 2022 by local residents from diverse backgrounds and politics, motivated by a widely felt need for healing and accountability in the aftermath of the convoy occupation in February 2022.

The impetus for a people's commission originated with community advocate and investigative researcher Ken Rubin. Over the spring of 2022 momentum quickly grew as different parts of the community expressed concern that during and since the occupation, their views had been largely ignored and their losses forgotten.

The Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), located in the red zone and serving many people affected by the convoy occupation, adopted OPC as a program, working with residents to bring this vision of a people's commission to life.

As community members came together, it became clear there was still extensive trauma, stemming from the harms people experienced and their feeling of having been abandoned. There was also frustration that official reviews launched by governments did not offer a space for community members to share their experience and provided little opportunity to hold governments to account for their failure to protect the rights of residents, workers and business owners.

OPC's mandate was to provide local residents with a venue to share their experiences of the convoy's impact on their lives and livelihoods and to offer recommendations to avert or minimize the risk of a similar ordeal in the future.

OPC differs from other bodies established to review the response to the convoy occupation, including the Public Order Emergency Commission, Parliament's Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, and the Convoy Protest Audits being carried out by the Office of the Auditor General of the City of Ottawa. Those reviews arose from legislative mandates, namely the Emergencies Act itself, or motions passed by Ottawa's City Council and Police Services Board.

Unlike those official processes, the OPC was convened by citizens and as such could not oblige governments to respond to its findings and recommendations. It lacked legal authority, powers or resources available to those bodies, such as the power to issue subpoenas and compel the disclosure of documents.

That means we were not always able to reach final conclusions about the specific reasons behind particular policies set by government or actions launched by police, the consequences of which were nonetheless felt widely in the community and featured prominently in testimony and submissions.

None of those qualifications should be seen as limitations; rather they underscore the unique nature and strength of the People's Commission process. By focusing on the experience and impact

at community level, we reflect a perspective that has not been central to official reviews – a perspective that should however be at the fore of understanding what happened and what went wrong during the convoy occupation, and what needs to change going forward.

OPC relied on generous support from foundations, donors and the Centretown Community Health Centre. In particular, we wish to recognize valued contributions from the Ken and Debbie Rubin Public Interest Advocacy Fund, the Maytree Foundation, the McConnell Foundation, the MakeWay Foundation, the Ottawa Community Foundation, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the National Union of Public and General Employees, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario Division and others, as well as welcome support from the Centretown Community Health Centre and community members living in areas deeply affected by the convoy occupation and beyond.

Appendix B

COMMISSIONERS BIOGRAPHIES

LEILANI FARHA

Leilani is Global Director of The Shift – an international human rights organization focused on housing, and the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, a post she held from 2014 – 2020. Her work is animated by the principle that housing is a social good and a human right – not a commodity.

Leilani serves as a Commissioner with the International Commission of Jurists and has a long history working in Canada to advance human rights. As Executive Director of Canada Without Poverty (2012 – 2020) she launched a successful Charter challenge to the tax rules governing charitable organizations.

Leilani, who is from Ottawa, co-chairs a national working group on housing issues and is working with cities across the country to use human rights law to effectively address homeless encampments.

MONIA MAZIGH

Monia is an award-winning author and human rights activist – and an Adjunct and Research Professor at Carleton University's Department of English and Literature. She writes in French and English and has authored a memoir and three critically acclaimed novels. Her latest novel, *Farida* won the Ottawa Book Award for French fiction. Her new memoir, "My personal journey with a "Scar...f", an essay/memoir about gendered islamophobia, will be published later this year.

Monia sits on the boards of the Rideau Institute, Ottawa Muslim Women's Organization, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Association des Auteurs et Auteurs de l'Ontario français. Monia is a member of the International Advisory Council for the Institute for Canadian Citizenship.

ALEX NEVE

Alex is an adjunct professor in international human rights law at the University of Ottawa and Dalhousie University, and a Senior Fellow with the uOttawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. He served as Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada from 2000 – 2020. In that role he led and took part in over forty human rights delegations throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, Guantánamo Bay and, closer to home, First Nations communities in Canada.

Alex is a lawyer, with an LLB from Dalhousie University and a Master's in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex. He has served as a member of the Immigration and Refugee Board, serves on the Board of the Centre for Law and Democracy and is a Fellow with the Atlantic Human Rights Centre.

An Officer of the Order of Canada, Alex is a long-time Ottawa resident.

DEBBIE OWUSU-AKYEEAH

Debbie is an award-winning Black feminist with over eight years of local and international advocacy experience in a variety of roles ranging from programming and counseling to policy analysis and project management. Since July 2020, she has served as Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD).

Debbie holds an MA in International Affairs. She has had the pleasure of bridging her passion for social justice with international development at Oxfam Canada and Global Affairs Canada – as well as through volunteering and leading feminist initiatives locally with organizations like the Ottawa Dyke March, Harmony House Women's Shelter, and Planned Parenthood Ottawa.

When she isn't active in her community organizing events, Debbie is probably on a field somewhere playing rugby. Or baking a cake.

Appendix C

OPC OUTREACH

PUBLIC HEARINGS

OPC began its public hearings on September 21, 2022, continuing through to December 10, 2022. Over the course of 13 hearings, held both online and in person, Commissioners heard from 56 residents. More than 300 people attended these hearings and more than 1,600 have viewed them on YouTube.

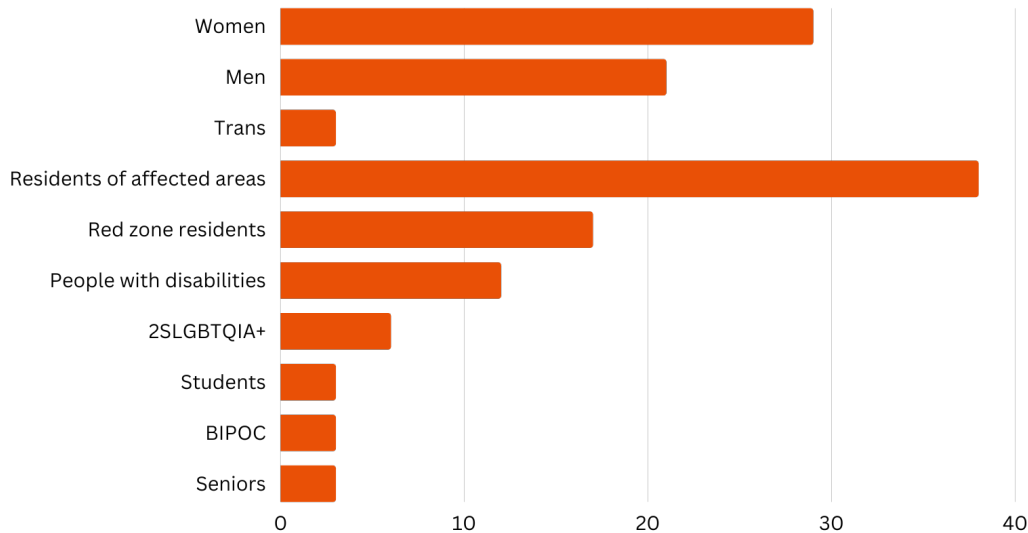
Some hearings grouped testimonies by theme, including one session dedicated to people with disabilities (October 12, 2022), a session dedicated to journalists (November 8, 2022) and two sessions dedicated to supporters of the convoy (October 5 and November 24, 2022).

While the majority of individuals who provided testimony, commentary and submissions described the convoy's harmful impact, 12.5% of people also spoke of ways that they felt that impact had been positive and beneficial to them.

DATES, LOCATIONS AND THEMES OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

September 21 In-person <i>McNabb Community Centre, Centretown</i>	November 8 Zoom <i>Special focus on journalists</i>
September 22 In-person <i>Le Patro, Lowertown</i>	November 16 Zoom
October 5 Zoom <i>Special focus on convoy supporters</i>	November 24 Zoom <i>Special focus on convoy supporters</i>
October 12 Zoom <i>Special focus on people with disabilities</i>	December 3 Zoom <i>Private hearings</i>
October 27 Zoom	December 6 Zoom
November 5 In-person <i>Jack Purcell Community Centre, Centretown</i>	December 7 Zoom
	December 10 In-person <i>Centre Pauline-Charron, Vanier</i>

Public hearings demographic breakdown



COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

OPC conducted eight community consultations with a total of 95 participants, targeting specific groups directly affected by the occupation, including people experiencing homelessness, Asian seniors, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, representatives from Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and others.

Commissioners met with local residents of two downtown Ottawa apartment buildings located on Somerset Street and on Bay Street where they heard from Asian seniors and people with mobility challenges.

With the support of Centretown Community Health Centre, OPC partnered with community agencies such as The Well, Good Companions Seniors Centre, City For All Women Initiative, Kind Space and Wisdom2Action to create safe spaces for people experiencing homelessness, seniors, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members to come forward with the experiences of the convoy.

Commissioners also met privately with four local residents who requested anonymity.

LISTING OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

395 Somerset Street - 52 participants, mostly Asian seniors

The Well - 8 participants

Good Companions Seniors Centre - 4 participants, all seniors

Kind Space 2SLGBTQIA+ sessions (2) - 10 participants

151 Bay Street - 7 participants including 2 who use mobility aids

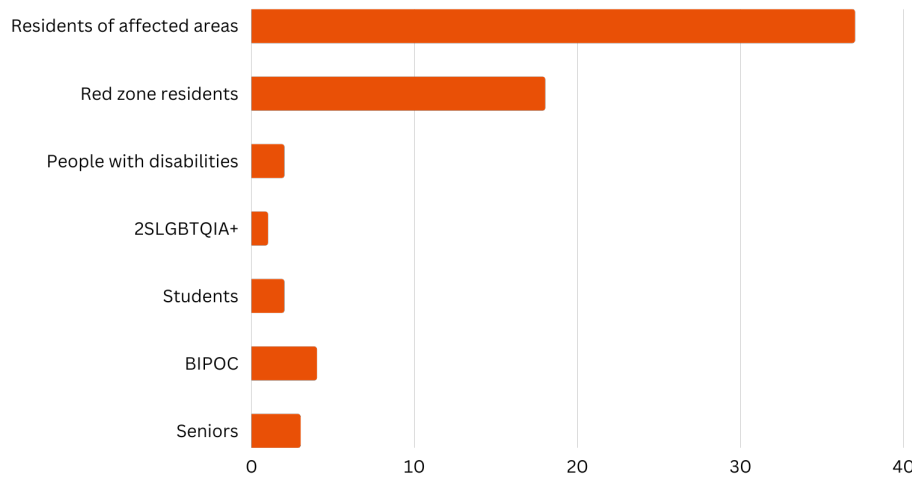
CAWI session - 10 participants

BIAs session - 4 participants

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

OPC received 90 written submissions from the public. Most submissions spoke negatively about the convoy's impact, however nine submissions offered positive comments.

Written submissions demographic breakdown



TOP TEN TAGS

A review of the oral and written submissions to OPC identify the following issues as the topics most often cited as concerns.

Issue	%
Impact of truck horns	36
Feeling threatened and unsafe	29
Lack of response from authorities	26
Harassment related to masks	25
Inability or fear of leaving home	24
Fumes	21
Mental health, anxiety	14
Impact of protest messages	14
Incidents of hate	11
Loss of trust in government	11

CONVOY TIMELINE

Using images, video, media coverage and other materials submitted by the public, OPC developed a timeline of events from mid-January through to mid-March 2022, documenting key elements of the impact of the convoy occupation on Ottawa residents and businesses.

INNER CITY STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

OPC convened an Inner-City Stakeholders Group, composed of members from community associations and agencies, business groups and unions, faith communities and organizations representing diverse groups — especially those confronting hate, discrimination and marginalization — to promote collective action to preempt a repeat of the convoy occupation.

This group has offered counsel and support to OPC, assessing available resources and developing proposals to bolster emergency preparedness in the community, drawing lessons learned from the response to the convoy occupation.

CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY INFORMANTS AND EXPERTS

OPC has consulted with Indigenous elders, public officials, experts and other key informants to carry out additional research or gather further information to complement or complete what we have heard from community members.

OPC consulted with community agencies such as Cornerstone Housing for Women, Good Companions Seniors Centre, The Well, Kind Space, Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition and others to assess the impact on vital service providers and vulnerable populations in the community.

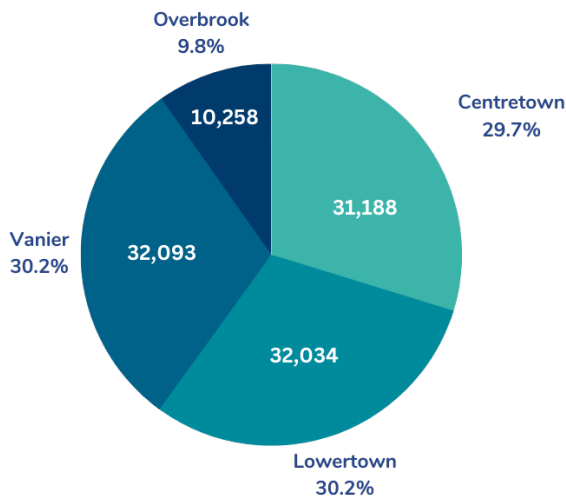
Commissioners consulted with Verna McGregor and Sheldon Kiishkens Ross McGregor from the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation. They also engaged with former City councillors Catherine McKenney and Mathieu Fleury, and Paul Champ, the lawyer representing thousands of residents and businesses in a class-action lawsuit against the 'Freedom Convoy'.

Appendix D

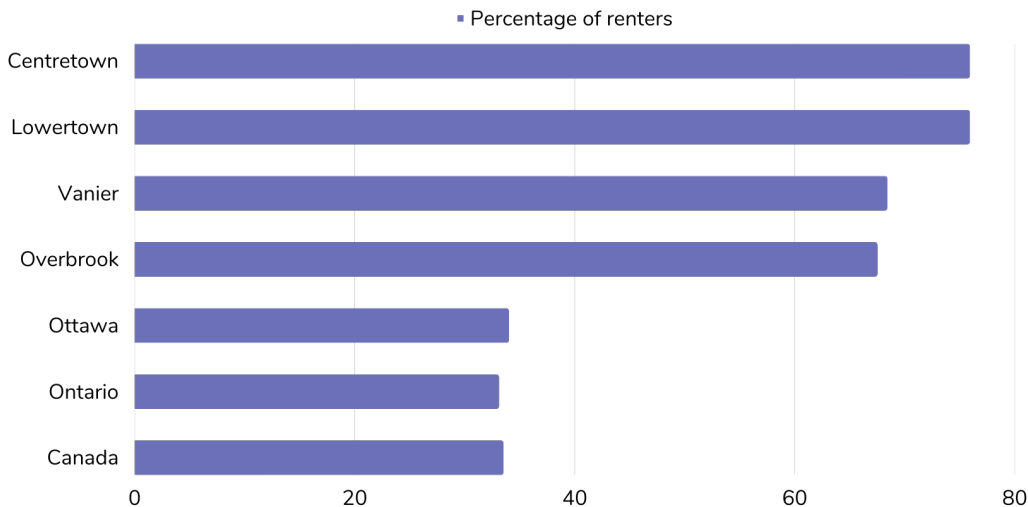
DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF AFFECTED AREAS

SUMMARY

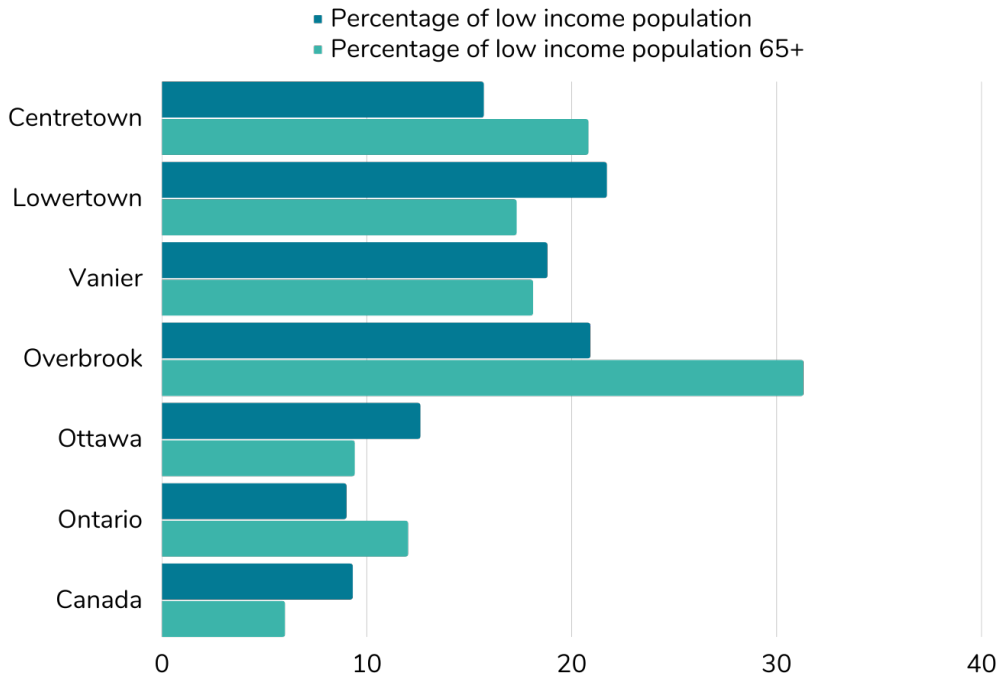
The total population of the affected neighbourhoods was 105,573 in 2021.



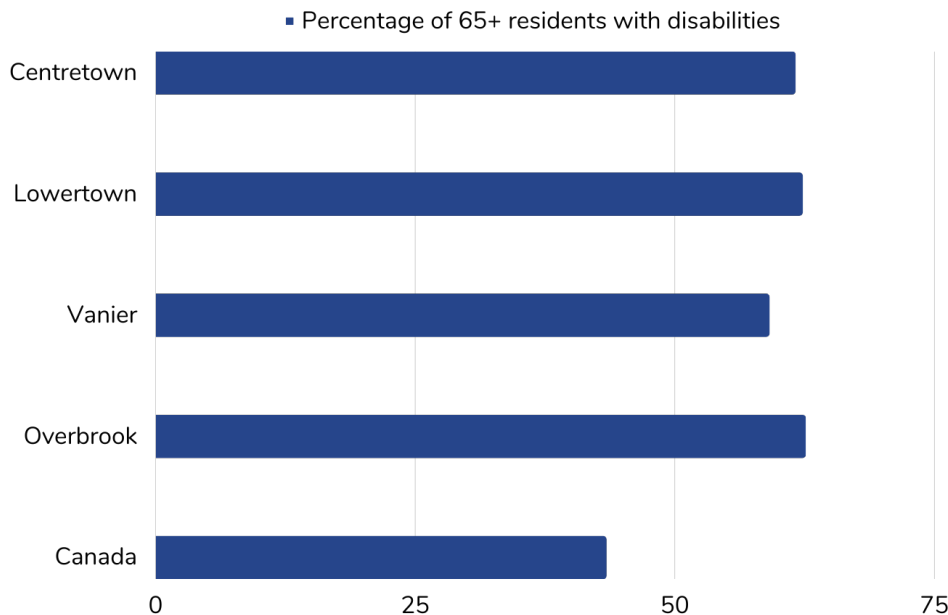
More than two-thirds of residents are renters. The affected neighbourhoods have more than twice the percentage of renters compared to national, provincial and Ottawa levels.



Median household income in the affected neighbourhoods is lower than average. Higher percentages of households are low income and, in particular, a higher percentage of seniors (65+). In Lowertown, Overbrook, and Vanier, the proportion of low-income households is twice the national and provincial average. For low-income seniors, the rate varies from three times higher (Lowertown) to five times higher (Overbrook).

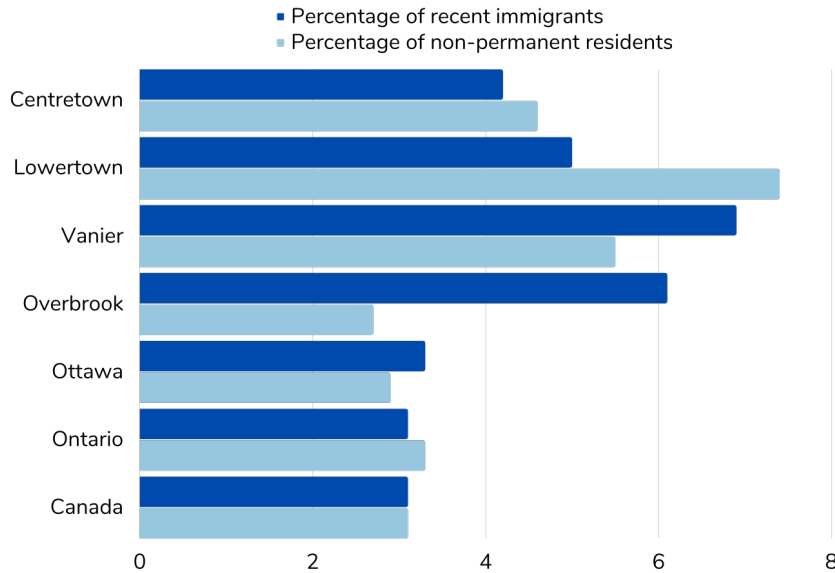


The percentage of seniors with disabilities is 18% higher in the affected neighbourhoods compared to the national level.

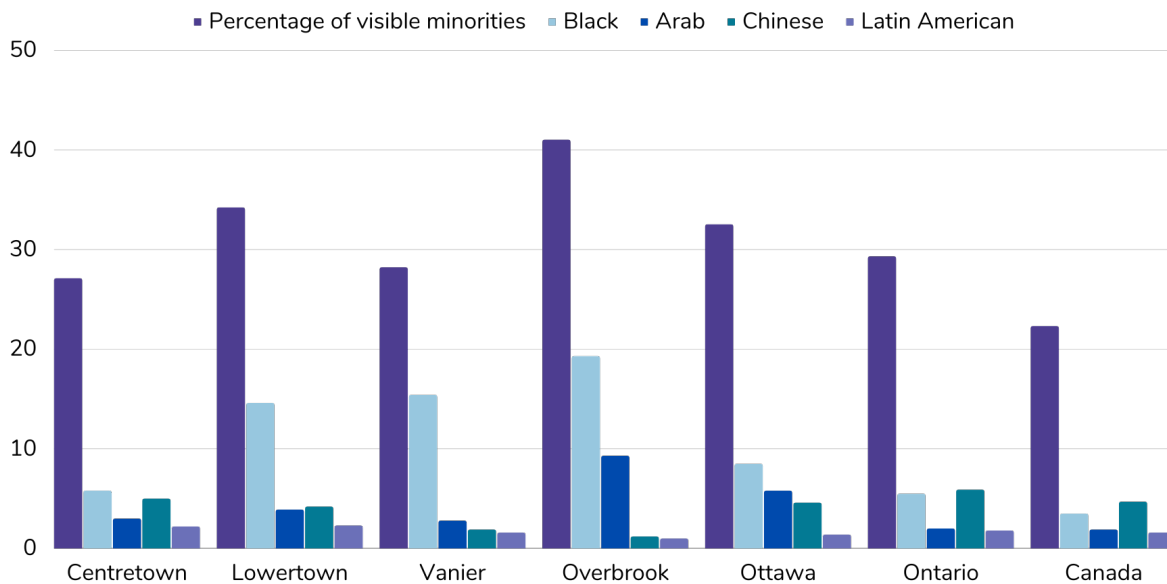


The affected neighbourhoods are home to a significant Indigenous population, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis residents and many Indigenous service organizations are located in the area, in particular in Vanier and Overbrook. In 2016, the total Indigenous population was 22,960, the highest concentration being in Overbrook (955), Centretown (860), and Vanier (790). The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition estimates Ottawa is home to 40,000 Indigenous people and the largest Inuit population outside of the North.¹

The percentage of recent immigrants (admitted 2016 to 2021) and non-permanent residents in the affected neighbourhoods is higher than for Ottawa as a whole and generally higher compared to Ontario and Canada.



The percentage of visible minorities is higher in Overbrook (41%) compared to nationally (22.3%), provincially (29.3%) and city-wide (32.5%). Lowertown, Overbrook, and Vanier are home to a much larger Black population (15.6%, 19.3%, and 15.4%, respectively) compared to Canada (3.5%), Ontario (5.5%), and Ottawa (8.5%).



¹ Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (2023). *Our Community*, www.ottawaaboriginalcoalition.com/community.

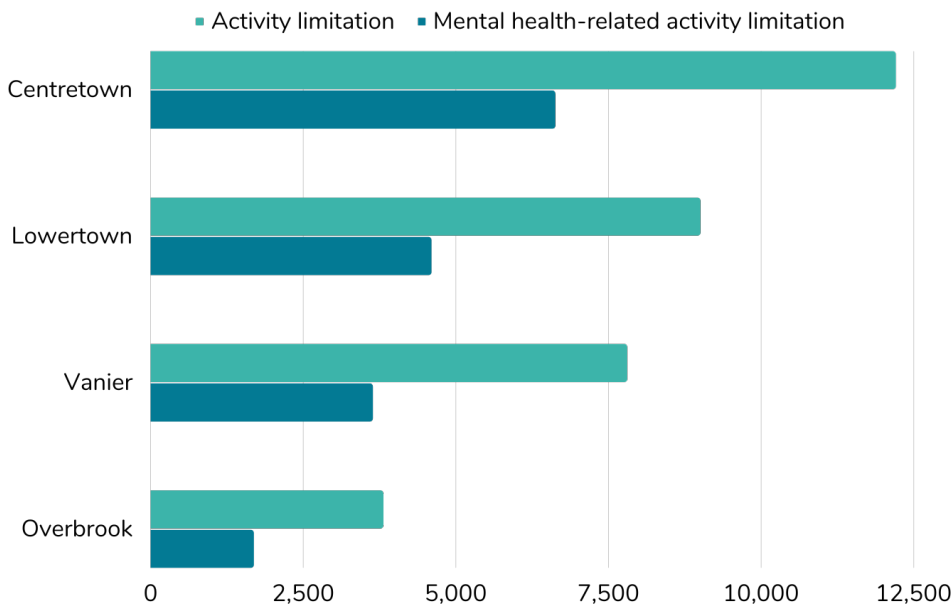
In the affected neighbourhoods, 32,875 people experience an activity limitation² that always, often, or sometimes interferes with their ability in performing usual activities. 16,560 people experience a mental-health related activity limitation.



2 in 5 Centretown residents have an activity limitation.



1 in 5 Centretown residents has a mental health-related activity limitation.



A significant portion of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community live in the neighbourhoods most affected by the convoy occupation.³

² Activity limitation is a dimension of health/disability used to capture long-standing limitations in performing usual activities due to health problems; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action.

³ There is minimal local data available on the particular realities of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Ottawa and numerous knowledge gaps regarding the health, well-being, socio-economic status and other key categories pertaining to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Ottawa (Wisdom2Action, Ottawa 2SLGBTQ+ Community Service Needs, Gaps and Recommendations).

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Statistics Canada (2019). *2016 Census of Population*; Ottawa Community Data Consortium, Community Data Program of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet), accessed from the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study/University of Ottawa under their Terms of Use.

Statistics Canada (2016). *A New Survey Measure of Disability: the Disability Screening Questions (DSQ)*.