



February 7, 2024

Montreal welcomes human rights defenders from all over the world for a week

MONTREAL — During a time marked by rising polarization on human rights issues, human rights defenders from across the world – including Haiti, East Africa, West Africa, the Middle East and North Africa – are traveling to Montreal from February 12-16. Hosted by Montreal-based nonprofit [Equitas](#), dozens of human rights defenders will gather in Montreal to learn from each other, connect, and deepen their skills as human rights experts in areas ranging from gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, women's rights, rights of people with disability and human rights in conflict zones.

After a week-long convening of the human rights defenders after Canada's International Development Week, the gathering will culminate in a public event themed on **"Turning Division into Dialogue" on February 15, 2024.**

The host organization, Equitas, is Canada's most recognized and active human rights education organization. Equitas works to advance equality, social justice and respect for human rights through transformative education programs. As the world shows increased hostility towards human rights defenders and spaces for dialogue are shrinking, activists around the world are trying to find ways to act as a bridge in times of polarization, to put an end to human rights abuses — now more than ever.

"We are excited to welcome human rights defenders from around the world **next week**," said Odette McCarthy, the Executive Director at Equitas. "[While Canada bids to return](#) to the UN Human Rights Council after a two-decade absence, eyes are on Canada when it comes to our leadership in championing human rights in Canada and internationally. Equitas convenes human rights defenders and opens up space for dialogue to turn division and polarization into respectful discussion and debate."

Media Availability - Panel Event: 'Turning Division into Dialogue' on February 15, 2024

On February 15, 2024, under the theme of Turning Division into Dialogue, Equitas is hosting a public event for the visiting human rights defenders, other local leaders, and the public.

Date: February 15, 2024

Location: Bell Canada - 1050 Beaver Hall Hill, Salle Polyvalente, Montreal

Time: The event will include an in-person networking event from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm EST followed by a panel discussion from 6:30 pm to 8 pm EST.

***Panelists will be available as of 3:30 pm EST for interviews.**

Featuring **Myrlande Pierre, Vice-president of Quebec's Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse** (Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission) as guest of honor, she will be exchanging with a diverse panel of human rights experts including:

- **Pearl Eliadis**, Human Rights Lawyer and Associate Professor at the Max Bell School of Public policy who was part of UN missions to Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide and has worked in human rights projects for Iraq and Afghanistan.
- **Alejandro Mayoral Baños**, Executive Director of Indigenous Friends Association, a community-based initiative using tech to eliminate gaps in education and employment for Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- **Hetera Estimphil**, President of Kouraj Pou Pwoteje Dwa Moun, a trans women and LGBTQI+ activist in Haiti who focuses on advocacy for LGBTQI+ people in Haiti, health and psychosocial support, and community mobilization.
- **Maiwand Rahyab**, Founder and CEO of Resilient Societies, an activist-led platform for empowering at-risk democracy and civil society activists.
- **Elysia Bryan Baynes**, Director of the Bishop's University Forum and first Black woman to hold a permanent television news anchor position in Quebec, will be facilitating the panel discussion on how we can use human rights education as a tool to turn division into dialogue in an era where polarization on human rights issues is prominent.

To learn more about the EquiTalks: Turning Division into Dialogue, please visit our [website](#)

This event is made possible thanks to the support of TD Bank Group and the Government of Canada.

"For us at TD, inclusion, equity and diversity are core values that guide every decision we make. We have supported Equitas for many years and are proud to present the first in-person EquiTalks in Montreal since the pandemic, and thus contribute to Turning division into dialogue."

- **Laurence Levy**, Senior Vice-President, Branch Banking, Quebec Region, TD Canada Trust

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Media contact:

Kathryn LeBlanc
kathryn@leblancandco.ca
873-355-1729

About Equitas

Equitas is Canada's most recognized and active human rights education organization. We work for the advancement of equality, social justice and respect for human dignity through transformative education programs. We empower people to address inequality and discrimination, and to work to build more inclusive and rights-respecting communities. For more information, visit www.equitas.org