

**An open letter to Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences
from the Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA)**

June 4, 2019
Vancouver, BC

On June 2nd, 2019 an incident took place on the campus of the University of British Columbia involving one of our members, two other Congress attendees, campus police and the RCMP. The following facts regarding the incident are **not disputed**:

1. A Black graduate student and member of the BCSA, Shelby McPhee, was approached by two other Congress attendees, who are white, and asked to produce proof that he was a registered attendee;
2. In a flagrant breach of the Congress Code of Conduct, these two attendees then followed, harassed, and photographed Mr. McPhee, accusing him of having stolen a laptop. They then contacted the RCMP. Congress volunteers contacted campus police, who then also called the RCMP;
3. The RCMP came onto the campus and the BCSA member was illegally detained until a representative from the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences arrived;
4. This Federation representative spoke first to the two accusers, and only spoke to Mr. McPhee AFTER the police confirmed that he had been fully exonerated.

Throughout this clear incident of racial profiling, Mr. McPhee received no respect or support from the Federation representative. In the hours following the incident, the Federation Executive had an opportunity to immediately respond to this breach of its own Code of Conduct by issuing a formal apology to Mr. McPhee. It chose not to do so. Moreover, the Federation has informed the BCSA that it will pursue an independent “fact checking” investigation into the incident before responding, which they anticipate will take up to three weeks.

As a new member association of the Federation, this treatment is deeply troubling. Our association boasts a majority Black membership and we take the safety of our members extremely seriously. Encounters with the police are extremely unsettling and frankly, unsafe, for people of African descent, given the strained history between these two groups. This incident is making us rethink our participation in Congress and our relationship with the Federation. We do not want to be a part of an event and Federation that does not value the safety and well-being of our members. We are very clear that this is part of a larger conversation currently taking place in Canada regarding the carding, street checks and surveillance of Black people in public spaces.

The BCSA demands that the Federation take the following actions in response to this incident:

1. The Federation **immediately** issue a public response acknowledging this incident, asserting zero tolerance for racial profiling and all forms of anti-Black racism, and a commitment to work with the BCSA to ensure that Congress is a welcoming space and experience for our members;
2. Ensure delivery to the two accusers involved, a letter that will be prepared by the BCSA in response to this incident;
3. The mention of anti-Black racism be added to the theme of Congress 2020: Bridging Divides (for example: *Bridging Divides and Confronting Anti-Black racism*);
4. If the BCSA remains a member association of the Federation, the waiving of the association's fees for Congress 2020.

We are looking forward to your response,

Black Canadian Studies Association

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