



August 15, 2025

Re: Embark's Board of Directors Recognizes and Affirms Emancipation Day

Content Warning/Trigger Warning: systemic racism, slavery, intergenerational trauma, colonialism.

History

August 1st marks Emancipation Day, which is a day of remembrance and continued struggle against colonial oppression. It commemorates the 1834 Slavery Abolition Act, imposed by the British Empire, which claimed to “abolish” slavery across its colonies. In reality, this act was far from full liberation. It freed only a portion of those enslaved, specifically children under the age of six, while forcing others into years of exploitative “apprenticeships” that continued to extract their labour and uphold colonial economies.

More than 800,000 Black and Indigenous peoples across the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and in what is now called Canada, were only granted partial freedom under the Slavery Abolition Act. This came after generations of fierce resistance and struggle by the enslaved themselves. Yet the so-called “abolition” still forced many into years of “apprenticeships”. To add to the injustice, the British government financially compensated the enslavers for their so-called “loss of property,” while the people who had endured centuries of violence, family separation, and cultural erasure received nothing. This made clear that the Act was never about justice for the enslaved; it was about protecting the wealth and power of colonizers and upholding the racist belief that Black and Indigenous lives existed only for exploitation and profit. We condemn this notion.

Emancipation Day is not simply a historical marker; it is a reminder that slavery and colonialism were never truly dismantled, and instead evolved into new forms. Black and Indigenous communities continue to face systemic violence, land dispossession, mass incarceration, cultural erasure, economic exclusion, and environmental racism. The same systems that enriched colonizers persist today, embedding inequities into education, healthcare, law, and governance.

To honour Emancipation Day is to reject sanitized histories, confront the ongoing



structures of colonialism, and commit to the liberation struggles that Black and Indigenous peoples have carried forward for centuries.

Environmental Racism

As an organization committed to climate justice and food insecurity, we would like to recognize the environmental racism subjected to Black and Indigenous communities, born from systems grounded in white supremacy and ignorance.

Even after emancipation, Black and Indigenous communities were segregated and confined to poorly resourced areas where they were denied clean water, proper waste management, and access to healthy food and soil. These same areas are more likely to be targeted for industrial pollution, including the dumping of hazardous waste where racialized communities live, resulting in severe health consequences. Even today, Black and Indigenous communities continue to be subsequently and disproportionately affected by food insecurity, climate events, and exposure to toxicity.

In November 2023, the Coastal GasLink pipeline in British Columbia was constructed and cut across the unceded territories of the Wet'suwet'en First Nations without informed consent from the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs. The pipeline continues to damage and threaten local wildlife, fisheries, and water quality that the Wet'suwet'en Peoples have relied on for generations. Wet'suwet'en land defenders were [raided](#), forcibly arrested, and [criminalized](#) by heavily militarized police forces despite having claim to the land under the [Delgamuukw ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997](#).

Capitalist greed continues to be prioritized over the rights, health, and well-being of Black and Indigenous communities. This is a reality that's further perpetuated by a lack of representation in policy and decision-making. Sustainability can only be achieved when it is grounded in racial equity and reparative justice. There remains urgent, unfinished collective work to dismantle the blatant roots of neglect and violence disproportionately endured by systemically marginalized communities.

Ongoing Conflicts and Humanitarian Crises

Contemporary forms of servitude remain rampant in countries like the Democratic

Republic of the Congo (DRC), where cobalt mining drives severe labour violations and environmental destruction. While illegal but unenforced, the informal cobalt supply chain is



powered by the exploitation of Black communities, which include women and children, who are paid poverty wages and forced to work in degrading conditions within industrial mines. From countless razed villages to the displacement of millions of people, mining has created a vicious cycle entrapping the Congolese people. So-called Canada is complicit in this humanitarian crisis, as it maintains cobalt mining operations in the DRC. Confronting this crisis requires holding Canada accountable in its role within this exploitative and demanding justice for the Congolese people whose lands and lives are being destroyed.

Call to Action

It is important to understand how these systems have historically and continue to target marginalized communities. As one board member shared from personal experience, the harsh realities of enslavement and child labour remain highly relevant in parts of South Asia and in places like Dubai (going beyond these regions as well), where entire infrastructures and economies are built on exploitation. In North America, while enslavement may be formally abolished, the effects of those discriminatory mindsets remain deeply embedded, and the systems that upheld them persist. No person is lesser than another, yet the media, education systems, and politicians continue to subtly and deliberately reinforce colonial beliefs.

As accomplices, we have a responsibility to enact our lifelong commitment to struggling with Black and Indigenous communities globally towards our collective liberation. Doing independent research and privileging the lived experiences of those directly impacted by injustices is valuable—but can only so far. Real solidarity is ongoing, unconditional, entangled in contradictions, and most importantly, not optional.

We, too, will continue supporting communities both within and beyond our space. We honour and uplift the student-led work that SOCA (Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry) and FNMISA (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Student Association) continue to do for the student body. We stand in deep solidarity with exploited peoples everywhere, including the peoples of Congo and Sudan, who continue to be harmed by white supremacy and colonial systems. Our solidarity is not symbolic—it is a commitment to action, to amplifying the voices of those most impacted, and to collectively dream and build a liberated world for all.

Embark Sustainability Society Board and Staff

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Learn More about Environmental Racism, Emancipation, and the History of Black Diaspora in so-called Canada

- [Environmental Racism in Canada](#)
- [Beyond Black History Month: taking action on environmental racism and justice](#)
- [Black Enslavement in Canada](#)
- [The story of Black slavery in Canadian history | CMHR](#)
- [Emancipation Day in Canada: Past, Present and Future](#)

Learn and Donate to Support Work to Address Humanitarian Crises in Sudan, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and More

- [Goma Actif](#) (“a collective of local volunteer activists” mobilizing to provide essential aid when Goma (and nearby towns) are faced with challenges, such as the M23 conflict - [The New Humanitarian](#))
- [Focus Congo](#) (a grassroots organization that sponsors students to develop education, provide access to medical relief and supplies, do peace and media work, and more)
- [Doctors Without Borders](#) (“providing critical medical assistance to people facing humanitarian crises in more than 70 countries around the world. This includes emergency care for millions of people affected by conflict in places such as Palestine, Haiti, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen, among many others”)

Resources for Care and Education

- [SFU Health & Counselling: Black Student Support & Healing Space](#)
- [Hogan's Alley Society](#)



- [Vancouver Black Therapy Foundation](#)

Support Indigenous Communities at SFU

- **SFU First Nations, Métis & Inuit Student Association (FNMISA)**
 - [Website](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
- **SFU Indigenous Student Centre**
 - [Website](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
- **Office for Aboriginal Peoples**
 - [Website](#)

Support Black Communities at SFU

- **SFU Students for Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA)**
 - [Website](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
- **SFU Black Caucus**
 - [Website](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
- **SFU African Student Association (ASA)**
 - [Info](#)
 - [Instagram](#)
- **SFU Nigerian Students Association (NSA)**
 - [Info](#)
 - [Facebook](#)
- **SFU Somali Students Association (SSA)**
 - [Info](#)
 - [Instagram](#)