

PRESS RELEASE

SAVE AFROFEST PROTEST ORGANISERS REJECT THE CANCELLATION OF AFROFEST 2026

Cancellation Is an Affront to Toronto's African Community, a Threat to African-Canadian-Owned Businesses—and an Issue Mayoral Candidates Cannot Ignore

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Save AfroFest Protest Organisers condemn the failure of the City of Toronto and all relevant stakeholders to secure a workable path for AfroFest 2026. We acknowledge the explanations that AfroFest had outgrown Woodbine Park and that another venue was not confirmed in time. But an explanation is not the same as accountability, and a promise for 2027 cannot restore what Toronto is losing in 2026.

AfroFest is not merely another date on Toronto's summer calendar. Since 1989, it has been a living stage for African music, arts, food, heritage, enterprise and belonging. It has given artists an audience, families a gathering place, visitors a reason to come to Toronto and African-Canadian entrepreneurs a marketplace in which years of work can meet tens of thousands of customers.

When an institution grows because the people have embraced it, that growth should become a reason to build—not a reason to cancel. A city that celebrates diversity in its speeches must also protect diversity in its decisions. A city that welcomes cultural success must create room for that success to flourish.

Every Reasonable Option Should Have Been Exhausted

If Woodbine Park could no longer safely accommodate AfroFest, planning for a suitable solution should have begun early enough to prevent cancellation. Alternative venues, revised dates, controlled entry, ticketing, temporary infrastructure, enhanced crowd management and additional municipal resources should have been evaluated transparently and in good faith.

Toronto has major public spaces, exhibition grounds, transit infrastructure and extensive event-management capacity. The public deserves to know why those resources could not produce a workable solution for one of Canada's most significant African cultural institutions.

We are especially concerned by reports that Woodbine Park's allowable event capacity has been reduced to 5,000 people. The City must disclose the metric, methodology and evidence used to reach that figure. Was it based on usable square footage, emergency-egress modelling, fire-code calculations, security requirements, transit capacity, environmental limits or another standard? Who conducted the assessment? When was it completed? Was the same methodology applied

consistently to other festivals using comparable public spaces? Safety must never be compromised—but safety decisions must be measurable, explainable and applied equally.

A Direct Threat to African-Canadian-Owned Businesses

The cancellation has created an immediate economic crisis for African-Canadian-owned vendors, caterers, retailers, importers and service providers operating here in Toronto and across Canada.

These Canadian businesses invested in inventory, ingredients, equipment, staffing, permits, advertising, transportation, storage and refrigeration because they reasonably expected AfroFest 2026 to proceed. Some secured culturally specific food products, beverages and merchandise through international supply chains to meet expected demand. Those purchases were made by Canadian enterprises, with Canadian capital, to serve customers at a Toronto event.

The loss is therefore not remote or foreign. It is local. It is rent that may go unpaid, wages that may not be issued, shifts that may disappear, tax revenue that may never be generated and household savings that may be lost. It will be felt in Toronto storefronts, Canadian warehouses, local kitchens and the homes of families who built businesses with courage and sacrifice.

Perishable goods may spoil. Other inventory may accumulate storage, refrigeration, insurance and financing costs. Businesses may be forced to discount stock, dispose of products, assume new debt or carry inventory until 2027. For small businesses operating on narrow margins, one lost festival can become one lost season—and one lost season can become a closed business.

These entrepreneurs did not cause the cancellation, and they must not be made to bear its cost alone. The City and relevant partners must meet with affected businesses, verify their losses and establish emergency relief, storage assistance and alternative vending opportunities.

African-Canadian-owned businesses are not collateral damage. They are Toronto businesses, Canadian employers and contributors to our shared prosperity.

A Question of Equity—and of Municipal Priorities

This cancellation raises serious questions about how Toronto supports major cultural events created by African, Caribbean and Black communities. We do not ask for special treatment. We ask for equal urgency, equal imagination, equal investment and equal access to municipal problem-solving.

If other major cultural institutions are met with solutions when they encounter growth, logistical pressure or venue constraints, AfroFest deserves no less. The public must be shown which venues were considered, when discussions began, what barriers arose, what resources were offered and why every proposed route failed.

There comes a moment when reassuring words are no longer enough. That moment is now. Commitment must take the form of disclosed evidence, clear timelines, economic support and decisions for which public officials are prepared to answer.

A Political Issue Toronto's Mayoral Candidates Cannot Ignore

Every candidate seeking to lead Toronto must understand what this moment represents. African, Caribbean and Black communities are watching—not merely for expressions of sympathy, but for evidence of leadership.

Candidates cannot seek our votes, donations, endorsements and volunteer labour while remaining silent when one of our most important cultural institutions is allowed to disappear from the calendar. Silence is not neutrality. In a moment that demands leadership, silence is itself a position.

Every mayoral candidate must state what should have been done differently, what immediate support should reach affected African-Canadian-owned businesses and what binding plan will ensure AfroFest returns in 2027 with an appropriate venue, sustainable funding, safe operations and long-term municipal support.

Our Demands

1. A transparent public account of every effort made to secure a workable venue and format for AfroFest 2026.
2. Full disclosure of the timeline, restrictions, safety concerns, venue assessments and options considered before cancellation.
3. Publication of the data, formula, professional assessment and governing standard used to establish Woodbine Park's reported 5,000-person capacity, including whether the same methodology is applied consistently to comparable events.
4. An urgent meeting among Music Africa, the City, affected businesses, community representatives and relevant municipal agencies.
5. A firm, publicly accountable AfroFest 2027 plan covering venue, funding, transit, safety, crowd management, deadlines and community consultation.
6. A review of municipal support for African, Caribbean and Black cultural festivals to ensure fairness, transparency and consistency.
7. Emergency financial relief for verified losses incurred by African-Canadian-owned businesses, including inventory, shipping, customs, storage, refrigeration, permits, staffing and marketing costs.
8. Immediate alternative vending opportunities at City-supported festivals, markets and events.
9. A formal local-business impact assessment measuring lost revenue, jobs, wages, taxes, sunk costs and the risk of closures.
10. Temporary storage and refrigeration assistance for affected businesses holding perishable or time-sensitive inventory.
11. A public commitment from every mayoral candidate explaining how they will protect AfroFest, affected businesses and equitable access to municipal cultural infrastructure.

We Will Not Be Silent

We honour Music Africa and every artist, worker, volunteer, vendor and community member who built AfroFest across nearly four decades. We also honour those whose advocacy compelled public recognition of what is at stake. But gratitude cannot replace accountability, and history cannot be protected by promises alone.

AfroFest belongs to the community that attended it, performed on its stages, invested in its marketplace and carried its spirit from one generation to the next. That community deserves answers. It deserves fairness. It deserves action.

We will continue to organize. We will continue to speak. We will continue to demand a city in which African culture is not treated as optional, African-Canadian businesses are not abandoned, and cultural success is not punished for having grown.

AfroFest must not be treated as expendable. African-Canadian-owned businesses must not be left behind. Toronto must rise to the promise it makes about itself—and it must do so now.

Signed

Chidi Nwanyanwu

Lead, Protest Organising

Management Team

Save AfroFest Protest Organisers