

# Onyx Initiative's Annual Gala Celebrates Progress & Highlights Career Gaps for Black Post-Secondary Students & Graduates

*Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, Great-Grandson of Nelson Mandela, Headlines Event Celebrating Black Excellence and Addressing Ongoing Income Gaps for Graduates.*

TORONTO, ONTARIO , CANADA, March 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Onyx Initiative](#), a Toronto based non-profit established in 2020 to bridge the pervasive gap in the recruitment, selection, and retention of Black college and university students, and recent graduates, for roles in corporate



Dr. Siyabulela Mandela speaking to the audience at the sold-out Onyx Initiative 2026 Gala

Canada hosted its highly anticipated Third Annual Fundraising Gala on Saturday, February 21, 2026. The evening, sponsored by Air Canada, Bold New Solutions, Jamaica Tourist Board and Rainforest Caribbean, was dedicated to celebrating the achievements of the organization's 1700+ program participants and recognizing the impact that the corporate, education and community partnerships have made in the lives of emerging leaders across the country.

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*Dr. Nigela Purboo, Co-founder and Executive Director, Onyx Initiative*

The yearly, sold-out event has become a cornerstone gathering during Black History Month bringing together Canadians from the worlds of business, entertainment, news, politics, education, and media. It is also viewed as a key networking opportunity, providing a welcoming space for some of the nation's biggest companies and the participants in the Onyx Scholars Program to foster

mutually beneficial professional relationships.

“Our gala is more than a celebration, it is a powerful reminder of what we can accomplish when we come together and invest our time, talent, and resources to break down barriers to access

for hardworking and ambitious, yet consistently undervalued, individuals seeking meaningful career opportunities,” said Dr. Nigela Purboo, Co-founder and Executive Director, Onyx Initiative. “We’ve made tremendous strides over the past five years with countless scholars securing roles with our employer partners, a direct result of the more than 100 job-readiness and employer discovery events that we host annually and the exponential rise in activity on our curated job board – the number of roles posted by our employer partners grew by 310% over the past two years and the percentage of scholars applying for these roles jumped to 560% between 2024 and 2025 and continues to rise by 34% into 2026.” Among the evening’s many highlights was a poignant keynote address from Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, renowned peace and human rights scholar, author, and great-grandson of Nelson Mandela. The 400+ audience was rivetted by his eloquent call-to-action that highlighted the connection between pivotal historical moments and current events.

“In recognition of Black History Month and the enduring call to leadership, legacy, and liberation, Onyx’s “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges” celebration honoured the sacrifices and triumphs that continue to shape generations,” said Dr. Mandela. “Drawing inspiration from the unwavering courage of Nelson Mandela, the prophetic vision of Martin Luther King Jr., and the uncompromising conviction of Malcolm X, the event affirmed that Black excellence is not confined to history, it is a living, rising force. The evening stands as both a tribute and a charge: to honour the light that cannot not be extinguished and to continue building bridges toward a freer, more equitable future.”



Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, Dr. Nigela Purboo, Dr. Wayne Purboo



Onyx Initiative Co-founders Drs. Nigela and Wayne Purboo, Keynote Speaker Dr. Siyabulela Mandela, and MC Tyrone Edwards with the 2026 recipients of the Onyx Initiative Employer, Education, Community, Volunteer and Scholar Awards.

Acknowledging the progress that has been made but also underscoring the promises that have not been kept and the data that supports the need for organizations like the Onyx Initiative was echoed throughout the night.

“Statistics reveal a troubling paradox: as education levels rise, the income gap between Black and White professionals actually widens - reaching 28% for those holding university degrees. By intervening directly at the point of recruitment, Onyx is actively closing this gap, ensuring that Canada’s economic prosperity is shared by those who have earned it,” said Dr. Wayne Purboo, Co-founder, Onyx Initiative. “Black Canadians graduate at a rate of 32.4%, nearly identical to the national average. Despite representing 4.3% of the total population, they account for an estimated 5% of all post-secondary graduates. This is a wealth of industrious future leaders that our society and collective consciousness cannot afford to ignore.”

Rounding out the festivities were speeches from an impressive array of award recipients whose commitment to Onyx and their own achievements reflect the highest ideals of service and success: Employer Award – Bank of Montreal; Educational Award – Northeastern University; Community Award – The EDGE Program; Volunteer Award – Blake, Cassels, & Graydon LLP; Scholar Award – Ms. Suelen Fagan, a third-year finance student at York University and Co-president of the Black Business Students’ Association.

The gala's February timing is also intended to spotlight the past and present changemakers whose vision, fortitude, and determination have led to advancements in many areas of society. This intention was on full display with a nod to the 30th Anniversary of Black History Month being celebrated in Canada and the significant role that The Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine, the first Black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, played in getting the motion unanimously adopted by the House of Commons.

“Black History Month is the perfect time to shine a well-deserved light those whose courage and conviction paved the way for us to pursue our dreams and turn ideas into impactful endeavours, said Nigela. “As we celebrate these milestones, our mission for the years ahead is clear - we are not merely filling roles, we are building a generational pipeline of Black executives and innovators whose success will enable them to in turn pay it forward.”

Proceeds from the gala will directly support the Onyx Initiative’s year-round resources and programming, including mentorship, career coaching, a curated job board, personal and professional development workshops, free LinkedIn Learning courses, employer discovery sessions, executive fireside chats, scholarships, and more. To find out more about the Onyx Initiative or to donate contact [info@onyxinitiative.org](mailto:info@onyxinitiative.org).

## [ABOUT ONYX INITIATIVE](#)

Onyx Initiative is a Toronto-based non-profit founded by entrepreneurs and philanthropists Drs. Wayne and Nigela Purboo to expand access to corporate careers for Black post-secondary students and recent graduates. The organization partners with employers, educational

institutions and community groups across Canada to strengthen recruitment pipelines, deliver career development programming and increase representation in internships and full-time roles.

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