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U of T Responds to the Lunar New Year “Hell Bank Note” Incident

In February 2022, CCNC-SJ reported on the [‘Hell Money’ incident that occurred at the University of Toronto Graduate House](#) where “HELL BANK NOTES” were distributed in traditional lucky red envelopes to Chinese students during Lunar New Year celebrations. An act that was regarded as harmful and threatening to the receiver. Within weeks, the [Asian Student Alliance](#) promptly acted by hosting a virtual community meeting to support students affected by this incident, and what many did not know is that during this event participants were terrorized by “a series of vulgar anti-Chinese threats in the chat box...[and] shortly followed by a white man appearing on camera with a machine gun.”

Participants were shocked and terrified for their safety and feared the repercussions of their attendance. Two days later, [the University released an apology regarding the Lunar New Year incident](#) but remained silent about the ‘machine gun’ incident, until it was covered by [Global News](#) and [U of T’s student newspaper, The Varsity](#), days later. As the result of this series of incidents, a university-wide forum was immediately initiated by the U of T Asian Alliance who mobilized within a span of five weeks.

The forum brought together students, staff, faculty, key administrative members, and representatives from various [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\)](#) departments and groups across three U of T campuses; and created [‘A Path Forward: Creating Safe & Inclusive Spaces at U of T’](#), a recommendation report to the University which contextualized the forum and represents the collective concerns and insights of the event. The report shares personal and communal impacts of anti-Asian racism and identifies where University of Toronto administration, systems, and attitudes need to improve.

The Vice President of People Strategy, Equity & Culture Department openly recognizes and appreciates that the Report holds University leadership accountable for this much-needed change and commends the nuanced two-pronged approach to change, that the Report advocates: supporting solidarity-building initiatives across disparate community groups and, simultaneously, creating strategies focused on removing barriers uniquely experienced by members of the U of T Asian community.

CCNC-SJ stands with the U of T Asian Alliance and supports the “work currently underway at the [Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office \(ARCDO\)](#), such as the newly commissioned Anti-Asian

Racism Working Group.” We urge the University to act in accordance with the 12 recommendations which provide invaluable insight into the breadth of issues and experiences that require great consideration across all anti-racism working groups and relevant faculty members, to ensure these recommendations inform planning that encompasses educational programming as well as institutional initiatives that advances the EDI’s efforts and principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion across its campuses.

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