



## NEWS RELEASE

### **The Samara Centre for Democracy Welcomes Three New Board Members**

*The Samara Centre welcomes Liban Abokor, Kris Archie, and Zain Velji to its Board of Directors.*

**TORONTO, December 20, 2021** – The Samara Centre for Democracy is honoured to welcome three new members to its Board of Directors: **Liban Abokor**, **Kris Archie**, and **Zain Velji**.

“The Samara Centre welcomes three outstanding and engaged citizens to our Board of Directors,” said **Michael MacMillan**, Co-Founder of the Samara Centre and Chair of the Board. “Liban, Kris, and Zain bring vital knowledge, perspective, and energy to the task of strengthening democracy in Canada. Their guidance will enhance our work, ensuring that it continues to resonate across the country.”

**Liban Abokor** is the Executive Director of Youth LEAPS, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving educational and employment outcomes for Black youth in Toronto.

“Democracies do not work without people. As a result, I'm interested in learning about, supporting, and contributing to ideas that increase opportunities and access for all people living Canadians to engage in active and informed engagement.”

A dedicated volunteer, Liban was a founding member of Ontario's Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, which guided the development of Ontario's Youth Action Plan and Youth Opportunities Fund. He is also a co-author of the UNFUNDED report and a co-founder of the Foundation for Black Communities, Canada's first-ever philanthropic foundation dedicated to investing directly in Black communities by supporting Black-led, serving and focused non-profits and charities.

**Kris Archie** is the Chief Executive Officer of The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (The Circle). A Secwepemc and Seme7 woman from Ts'qescen, a mother, aunty and engaged community member, Kris is passionate about heart-based community work and facilitating positive change.

“I'm pleased to join the Samara Centre board and participate in their work to support and strengthen the understanding of democracy. As a Secwepemc woman, an Indigenous woman in this country, I have clear understanding of my accountabilities as a citizen and hope to help highlight and amplify the various ways in which Indigenous and other equity seeking people in this country activate their democratic engagement. I'm excited to work alongside the board and support the leadership of Sabreena Delhon.”

In all of her roles, Kris works to transform philanthropy and contribute to positive change by creating spaces of shared learning, relationship-building and centering Indigenous wisdom. She is a PLACES Fellow Alum of 2015 with The Funders Network, a board member with Environment Funders Canada and

JUMP! Canada and a newly appointed Dialogue Fellow with Simon Fraser University focused on Indigenous ways of knowing and Philanthropy.

**Zain Velji** is a Partner and VP Strategy for Northweather, and brings a decade of experience in political, business, and non-profit communications, as well as marketing and engagement.

"Democracy is fragile and we take it for granted at our peril. Samara bridges policy, politics, and a healthy (while sometimes uncomfortable) discourse on the state of our democracy to ensure we protect it and make it stronger."

Zain brings a decade of experience in political, business, and non-profit communications, as well as marketing and engagement. He is a frequent public speaker and regular political commentator who appears weekly on CBC radio and television and appears in federal election coverage for CTV and Bell Media. An experienced consultant and campaign strategist, Zain is the host of the award-winning podcast *The Strategists*, where he dissects political strategy and public affairs issues of the day, and the host of the Zain Velji show on Newstalk 1010.

Founded in 2007, the Samara Centre has studied the lived experience of elected officials for nearly 15 years. The Samara Centre's goal is to make Canadian politics more accessible, responsive, and inclusive to all. We are delighted and excited to welcome this new group to the work of the organization in service of our mission to strengthen Canada's democracy.

The Samara Centre's [Board of Directors](#) is composed of a visionary group of leaders active in their respective fields. The incoming Board Members join the current Members, who are:

Michael MacMillan, Co-founder and Chair  
Stephanie MacKendrick  
Janet Yale  
Leen Al Zaibak  
Rick Mercer

The Hon. Ratna Omidvar, C.M., O.Ont.  
Ruth Ostrower  
Chad Rogers  
William Young

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### **About the Samara Centre for Democracy**

The Samara Centre for Democracy is a non-partisan charity that is committed to securing an accessible, responsive and inclusive democratic culture in Canada. The Samara Centre's insights make it a go-to resource for active citizens, public leaders and the media. A samara is the winged "helicopter" seed that falls from the maple tree. A symbol of Canada, it is also a reminder that from small seeds, big ideas can grow.

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### **Contact**

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