

2018 YWCA TORONTO WOMEN OF DISTINCTION



ZANANA AKANDE *Public Service*

A strong advocate for equity and social justice, Zanana Akande is generating a tailwind of inspiration for all women. As an educator, policy shaper and community advocate, Zanana has forged a career of groundbreaking accomplishments.

Born in a family of educators, civic engagement has always been part of the fibre of her personal and social landscape. Her teaching career with the Toronto District School Board was a vindication of sorts for her parents who were denied the right to hold teaching positions in Canada. Injustices such as this served to embolden her commitment to fairness and equity as she went on to become an accomplished principal, designing programs for students with differential needs.

Zanana was recognized as the first Black woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1990. In her appointment as Minister of Community and Social Services, she made political history in becoming the first Black woman to hold a cabinet position in Canada. Her time in office was instrumental in shaping public policies fundamental to the lives of marginalized women. She led a meaningful social welfare reform that materialized in increases to social assistance rates and benefits supporting women in shelters. She understood the importance of food security when she approved precedent setting governmental support for our foodbank system. Her

strong voice as a cabinet minister, as the parliamentary assistant to the premiere, and a determined member, contributed to the passing of Ontario's first mandatory Employment Equity Legislation – legislation that would institutionalize rights and break down barriers for all women in the workplace.

Zanana also co-founded Tiger Lily, the first magazine/journal in Ontario grounded in the voices and experiences of women of colour. This magazine proved to be a profoundly empowering forum for women within the racialized, immigrant and refugee community – shedding light on a richness of women's experiences that would otherwise have remained invisible.

Since her retirement from public life, Zanana has continued to be engaged in her community, lending her wisdom and her energies to various social justice initiatives. She is valued as a treasured elder on whose shoulders so many women will stand to achieve their deserved height in the world.


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