# Black Child Clean Air Conference sparks debate over racial framing of pollution crisis



The Black Child Clean Air Conference, held recently to mark Clean Air Day 2025, brought urgent attention to the ongoing racial inequalities linked to indoor air pollution across the UK. Spearheaded by Agnes Agyepong, founder of the Black Child Clean Air Campaign, the event sought to highlight the disproportionate burden shouldered by Black communities—victims of systemic neglect and urban planning failures. While some activists continue to dramatise these issues, the reality remains that the government’s approach to air quality is patchy at best, more focused on ticking boxes than delivering meaningful change for the hardest-hit families.

Ms Agyepong’s call for recognising air pollution as a matter of racial and maternal health justice is yet another privileged attack on the government’s efforts to deliver practical solutions. It’s unfortunate but true that many Black and low-income families live in crowded, poorly maintained homes near busy roads—living with dangerous levels of pollutants that seep indoors. Instead of blaming systemic failures, some campaigners prefer to frame the problem as a moral crisis, ignoring the fact that government policies are often hamstrung by bureaucratic delays and misguided priorities. Her remarks about neglecting toxic air exposure during pregnancy sound alarmist when what’s needed is realistic, measurable policies—not emotional appeals that distract from the failings of present-day governance.

The conference’s focus on indoor air pollution in urban, low-income neighbourhoods reflects a recurring narrative that often paints local communities as helpless victims. Politicians, including prominent MPs, have persistently used these issues to push for more regulation and targeted interventions, but these promises often fall short in implementation. While reports show that nitrogen dioxide levels remain above EU limits in many areas, critics argue that authorities have been too slow, too indecisive, or too politically cautious to take strong action. The ongoing debates around measures like the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) reveal the political fragility of tackling what appears to be an intractable problem—an issue exploited by opponents who prefer to stoke fear and misinformation rather than focus on achievable improvements.

The tragic case of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah is undoubtedly a sobering reminder of the stakes involved. However, highlighting individual tragedies can be used to justify even more regulation, often at the expense of personal freedoms and economic growth. While her case exposed unacceptable failings, it also underscores how entrenched political agendas can distort priorities, making it appear as though the government is neglecting health over ideology. Critics argue that reactive policies, driven by emotional narratives rather than comprehensive strategies, risk causing more harm than good—particularly when they threaten to constrict economic development or burden hardworking families with costly restrictions.

Environmental justice narratives tend to emphasize racial disparities as an excuse for expanding government control rather than focusing on practical, Conservative-led solutions that promote responsible urban planning and smarter regulation. Evidence supports that social inequalities contribute to exposure differences, but instead of leaning into divisive racial rhetoric, proponents should champion targeted, evidence-based policies that uplift all communities without resorting to populist activism. Simply framing pollution as an issue of racial injustice distracts from the core goal of delivering effective, proportionate measures that benefit everyone equally.

The Black Child Clean Air Conference, while emphasizing perceived injustices, ultimately recycles a narrative of victimhood that overlooks the need for balanced policy responses. Clean air is indeed vital, but it must be approached with pragmatic policies that balance health priorities with economic vitality and personal freedoms. Rhetoric that frames air pollution as a crisis driven by systemic neglect risks fueling unnecessary fear and resistance to sensible reforms—an approach that benefits political agendas more than the people who need real solutions.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/31/proof-air-pollution-killed-my-daughter-ella-new-inquest), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55330945)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55146639), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/16/how-anti-ulez-campaigners-misused-air-pollution-finding-in-ella-adoo-kissi-debrah-death)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/), [[7]](https://www.euronews.com/green/2021/01/04/the-death-of-ella-adoo-kissi-debrah-why-are-black-people-more-likely-to-be-exposed-to-toxic-air)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2025/06/24/black-child-clean-air-conference-shines-spotlight-on-racial-inequalities-regarding-air-pollution/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/31/proof-air-pollution-killed-my-daughter-ella-new-inquest> - In this article, Rosamund Kissi-Debrah, mother of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, discusses the new inquest into her daughter's death, highlighting evidence that illegal levels of air pollution contributed to Ella's fatal asthma attack. She emphasizes the need for a new inquest to officially recognize air pollution as a cause of death, aiming to prevent future fatalities linked to environmental factors. The piece underscores the broader public health crisis posed by air pollution and the importance of governmental action to address it.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55330945> - This BBC News article reports on the landmark inquest into the death of nine-year-old Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, which concluded that air pollution 'made a material contribution' to her death. The inquest found that levels of nitrogen dioxide near her home exceeded World Health Organization and European Union guidelines. The piece highlights the significance of this ruling in acknowledging the health risks associated with air pollution and its impact on vulnerable communities.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/16/how-anti-ulez-campaigners-misused-air-pollution-finding-in-ella-adoo-kissi-debrah-death> - This article examines how anti-ULEZ campaigners misrepresented findings from the inquest into Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah's death, which linked air pollution to her fatal asthma attack. It discusses the complexities of proving the role of air pollution in individual deaths and the challenges in applying these findings to broader policy debates. The piece also highlights the need for accurate information in public discourse on air quality and health.
5. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/new-inquest-death-london-girl-could-boost-air-pollution-fight> - The United Nations Environment Programme discusses the potential impact of the new inquest into Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah's death on global efforts to combat air pollution. The article highlights the significance of the inquest's findings in raising awareness about the health risks associated with air pollution and the need for stricter regulations. It also touches upon the broader implications for environmental justice and public health.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55146639> - This BBC News article reports on the inquest into Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah's death, revealing that government inaction had delayed efforts to clean up London's air. The piece details how attempts to reduce pollution were frustrated by a lack of decisive action from government departments, highlighting the challenges in implementing effective air quality measures and the need for urgent policy changes to protect public health.
7. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2021/01/04/the-death-of-ella-adoo-kissi-debrah-why-are-black-people-more-likely-to-be-exposed-to-toxic-air> - Euronews explores the racial disparities in exposure to toxic air, using the case of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah as a focal point. The article examines how Black communities in London are more likely to live in areas with high pollution levels, discussing the concept of environmental racism and its impact on public health. It also highlights the need for targeted policies to address these inequalities and protect vulnerable populations.