



**NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF CANADIAN MUSLIMS**

Your Voice. Your Future.

Statements in Support of the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

January 28, 2014

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has worked with NCCM on a number of issues important to protecting and promoting the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*. We greatly admire the work of NCCM which seeks to uphold rights protection, and to foster inclusiveness and respect for all people, regardless of religious belief, and we have enjoyed working alongside them to fight for due process and fairness. As an organization committed to freedom of expression and association, CCLA is deeply concerned by reports which suggest the government's attempt to silence critical or dissenting voices, and in particular, to do so by suggesting links to terrorist groups.

- Sukanya Pillay, Acting Executive Director and Interim General Counsel; Director, National Security Program, Canadian Civil Liberties Association

The Canadian Association of University Teachers joins with the National Council of Canadian Muslims in expressing deep concern about the effort of the Prime Minister's Office to smear the NCCM for raising a legitimate question about an individual the Prime Minister had invited to be part of his delegation to the Middle East. Freedom of expression is the bedrock of any democracy, but that freedom is undermined whenever governments attempt to silence critics rather than engage the substance of their criticism. CAUT has worked with the NCCM in recent years in promoting *Charter* rights and freedoms. We join with NCCM in calling on the Prime Minister's Office to retract its unjustified criticism of NCCM and to publicly apologize.

- James L. Turk, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers

The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) has a record of public service and its work enriches Canadian society. Its work helps to educate Canadians, through advocacy on civil liberties, human rights and discrimination, and to build comity and understanding between cultural communities. The NCCM is an organization that participates vigorously in the democratic process, including appearing as witness in many Parliamentary proceedings and acting as intervenor in multiple court cases at the Supreme Court of Canada.

The BCCLA has worked as an ally of National Council of Canadian Muslims and its predecessor CAIR-CAN in the past. We have often found ourselves on the same side of various issues. Some examples are our work on the Maher Arar inquiry, our work on anti-terrorism issues including security certificates, and most recently on the Combating Terrorism Act. On other issues where we differ in opinion, we welcome the NCCM's contributions that enhance democratic debate.

The BCCLA is committed to defending the freedom of expression and association of all in Canadian society. We are troubled to learn about reports from which it appears that the federal government is attempting to chill the expression of people who are critical of its decisions, in this case, by making accusations that those people are connected to terrorist groups.

- Josh Paterson, Executive Director, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

As a Canadian who was wrongly labeled a terrorist by journalists and by some politicians, I find the comments made by the Prime Minister's Office with respect to the National Council of Canadian Muslims extremely disturbing. This labeling has severe implications not only on NCCM but also on the law-abiding people who work for and support the organization. I personally know how it feels to live with such stigma on a daily basis. As put nicely in the words of Justice Dennis O'Connor: "labels, even unfair and inaccurate ones, have a tendency to stick."

- Maher Arar

I am very concerned by the troubling comments issued by the Prime Minister's Office. The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) is an advocacy organization that represents Canadians Muslims with the media, public officials and other national institutions. When I campaigned for my husband's release, the NCCM stood by me and supported my plight. The PMO owes Canadians an explanation.

- Dr. Monia Mazigh, Wife of Maher Arar

For over 30 years, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women has worked tirelessly to promote peace and understanding among Canadians. CCMW have been at the forefront of dispelling myths about Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular.

We have known and worked with the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) since its inception.

We have admired their tireless efforts in causes of justice and equality and human rights in Canada. Through non-confrontational, peaceful means, NCCM has diffused many cases where racism and bigotry have been a factor. Their educational tool kits and workshops have helped educators and employers ease tensions and create understanding.

There is disquiet among many Muslims in Canada today, when their own elected leaders give short shrift to their concerns. This was evident in the response from the Director of Communications for the Office of the Prime Minister, Jason MacDonald, to the NCCM's letter which urged the Prime Minister to reconsider including Rabbi Daniel Korobkin in his Mideast delegation with clear and legitimate reasons given in the letter.

The problem is further exacerbated when a respected human rights organization like the NCCM is maligned with an unfounded and dangerous allegation of having ties to an illegal group. This defamation endangers the very valuable work of NCCM and goes against every Canadian democratic principle. Further, it exposes the members of NCCM and the whole Muslim Community to suspicion, hatred and bigotry.

We join NCCM in calling Prime Minister Stephen Harper to respond to NCCM's concerns and disassociate himself from the inflammatory statement in order to restore the good name of an esteemed Canadian organization.

- Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

La *Coalition pour la surveillance internationale des libertés civiles* (CSILC) regroupe 38 ONG, syndicats, associations professionnelles, groupes confessionnels, organisations environnementales, de protection des droits humains et des libertés civiles, ainsi que des groupes représentant des communautés immigrantes et réfugiées au Canada. Son mandat est de promouvoir et défendre le respect des droits humains, des conventions et des règles de droit international dans la lutte contre le terrorisme.

Le Conseil National des Musulmans Canadien est un membre fondateur de la CSILC avec lequel nous avons eu le privilège de collaborer depuis au-delà d'une décennie

dans de nombreux dossiers. Ses prises de position commune avec celles de l'ensemble des membres de la CSILC, son engagement et son leadership dans certains dossiers ont été d'une valeur inestimable pour le travail de la coalition, et en ont fait un partenaire respecté et sollicité.

Au cours de ces treize dernières années, la CSILC et le CNMC ont travaillé de concert pour assurer la primauté du droit et le respect des lois, y inclus la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés, en matière de sécurité nationale.

Ce travail, nous l'avons fait dans un esprit d'inclusion et de participation dans le cadre d'une société démocratique où les organisations de la société civile ont, non seulement le droit ou le privilège, mais aussi le devoir de participer de façon responsable au processus politique. Cela inclus le droit d'expression et de communiquer ses inquiétudes au Bureau du Premier Ministre.

- Roch Tassé, National Co-ordinator, International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) / Coalition pour la surveillance internationale des libertés civiles (CSILC)

Amnesty International was deeply troubled to learn that Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Director of Communications publicly described the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) as "... an organization with documented ties to a terrorist organization such as Hamas." The remark came in response to concerns raised by the NCCM about the inclusion of an individual, who had been publicly associated with an event involving two speakers from the organization "Stop Islamization of America", in the Prime Minister's delegation on his recent trip to Israel. No evidence in support of the accusation that the NCCM is tied to a terrorist organization was produced or referred to at the time and has not been produced or referred to since.

Amnesty International has worked closely with the NCCM and its predecessor organization, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations for over a decade. We have collaborated with respect to some of the leading cases involving concerns about human rights violations associated with Canada's national security laws, policies and practices, including the public inquiry into the case of Maher Arar, the Iacobucci Inquiry into the cases of Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad Abou Elmaati and Muayyed Nureddin, the case of Omar Khadr, and Canada's immigration security certificate system.

NCCM has been a principled and at times outspoken voice in defence of human rights and has frequently joined Amnesty International in insisting that rights not be violated

or undermined in the name of national security. Amnesty International's experience of working with the NCCM has been that of an organization that speaks out both against terrorism and against human rights violations committed in the name of countering terrorism.

Amnesty International has joined many other civil society organizations in Canada in recent years in highlighting a growing number of cases in which federal government measures and actions seek to punish and silence groups that are openly critical of the government. Through research carried out by the widely supported Voices Coalition, a disturbing pattern has emerged of organizations and individuals being targeted for reprisal when expressing views contrary to government policy. This has particularly been the case with a number of sensitive, high profile issues, such as the situation in Israel and the rights of Palestinians. One such government approach has been to denigrate and vilify organizations or individuals who express concern about government policies or actions without any factual basis to support the allegations; and to do so very publicly.

There are very few allegations that can be leveled against a group that are more highly charged than to state that it is tied to terrorism. When such an accusation is made without any evidence in support, the damage to a group's reputation and ability to continue with its work can be considerable. When such an accusation is made without any evidence in support, it is difficult to reach any other conclusion than that the intention was to punish the group for its views and an attempt to silence the group from expressing such views in the future.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that this may be what lay behind describing the NCCM as being "tied to a terrorist group". It is therefore understandable and very important that the NCCM has launched legal action; both to defend its own reputation but also to make it clear that unfounded and inflammatory accusations against groups that criticize the government cannot and will not be tolerated.

- Amnesty International Canada

The Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims (CAJM) is an organization created in 1996 whose purpose is to bring members of the Jewish and Muslim communities in Canada closer together, to promote positive interaction, and to work together to counter problems faced by both communities. Our objectives are to learn, understand and

jointly work together, in order to promote harmony between Canadian Muslims and Jews.

Our approach is to reach out to like-minded organizations in both communities to achieve our goal. NCCM is one organization that over the past several years has consistently supported our goals and has participated in several of our programs designed to build inter-faith cooperation between Jews and Muslims.

Our concern is the recent statement issued by the office of the Prime Minister of Canada that NCCM (The National Council of Canadian Muslims) is allegedly *“an organization with documented ties to a terrorist organization such as Hamas”*.

No evidence was presented to support this highly inflammatory and prejudicial statement, which would tarnish the reputation of NCCM among progressive organizations who are working to ensure that Canada is a model of tolerance, cooperation and respect for civil liberties between diverse religious and cultural groups.

For the past 6 years, CAJM has been the Canadian host of the Weekend of Twinning of Synagogues and Mosques, an project initiated by Rabbi Marc Schneier, President of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) in New York. As Rabbi Marc Schneier, explained *“Whenever Jews or Muslims are targets of bigotry anywhere in the world, members of the two communities should stand together against both Islamophobia and antisemitism.”*

That is why we are speaking out about the defamatory statements allegedly made by a member of the Prime Minister’s staff.

The context was a concern raised by NCCM in relation to some members of the delegation accompanying Prime Minister Harper to Israel. Among the list funded by Canadian taxpayers was Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, the senior rabbi at Beth Avraham Yoseph Congregation, who introduced and made supportive comments about Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer. These individuals are infamous for their divisive, bigoted and hate filled rhetoric about Muslims. In fact the Toronto Board of Rabbis condemned their invitation to speak in Toronto and described Ms Geller as a *“vocal critic of radical Islam, known for her extreme criticism of Muslims in language that is intended to shock and ridicule.”*

Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer were invited to Canada to speak by the Jewish Defence League of Canada, who were also represented in the Prime Minister’s delegation. The JDL in the United States was [“deemed a right-wing terrorist group” by the FBI in a 2001 report](#) on the basis that it was involved in plotting and executing acts of terrorism in the U.S.

There are several concerns raised by this incident. First and most significant is that statements were made by the PMO that vilify an organization with no evidence presented. In the climate since 9/11, Muslim organizations are easy fodder for intolerant extremists who can make unsubstantiated statements that our government accepts and then uses to tarnish the reputation of more mainstream organizations.

Secondly, such allegations create a chill among progressive, peace-oriented groups who then are afraid to associate with the targets of false accusations. Ironically, this marginalizes progressive organizations and gives power and superior access to our government to the extremists.

CAJM is calling on our government to support progressive, centrist groups whose mission is to foster peaceful and respectful relations in Canada.

An apology is due to NCCM and an explanation is requested as to why such anti-Muslim extremists were part of the delegation funded by Canadian taxpayers.

- Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims (CAJM)