



**NATIONAL COUNCIL  
OF CANADIAN MUSLIMS**

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**ORAL SUBMISSION ON STUDY ON SYSTEMIC RACISM AND  
RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION (M-103)**

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**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CANADIAN HERITAGE (CHPC)**

HOUSE OF COMMONS | OCTOBER 4, 2017

**OPENING STATEMENT BY**  
**IHSAAN GARDEE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**-AND-**  
**EVE TORRES, PUBLIC AFFAIRS COORDINATOR (QUEBEC)**

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**Introduction**

Madam Chair and honourable members: thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee, to share the perspective of the National Council of Canadian Muslims on this committee's study of systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia.

Briefly, the National Council of Canadian Muslims or NCCM is an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit grassroots organization. Our mission is to protect human rights and civil liberties, to challenge discrimination and Islamophobia, to build mutual understanding, and to advance the public concerns of Canadian Muslim communities.

The task set for you according to the wording contained in Motion 103 is to:

“[D]evelop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia, in Canada, while ensuring a community-centered focus with a holistic response through evidence based policy-making.”

This is a very important task that is timely and essential for the ongoing well-being of Canadians and newcomers. Systemic discrimination and religious discrimination have a long and sad history in Canada with many current expressions including anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism and anti-Semitism. All of these require the attention and concern of this committee.

**Islamophobia**

As we know and have heard, Islamophobia is specifically mentioned in the motion while other specific examples are not and some have and continue to make an issue of this.

From our perspective, as an agency working on the frontlines of this issue and receiving regular and increasing complaints of anti-Muslim discrimination and harassment, the specific reference to Islamophobia is absolutely appropriate. This is in line with other actions that the government has taken including a unanimously adopted motion in 2015, M-630, which specifically condemned anti-Semitism.

This committee's study is also important because of the devastating attack on January 29, 2017, at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City, that left six worshippers dead, many injured and families shattered. This was the single most horrific mass killing at a place of worship in Canadian history and it occurred in the context of well-documented growing expressions of hate and discrimination against Muslims.

As you have heard Police-reported hate crimes targeting Canadian Muslims increased by almost 60% from the year 2014 to 2015 and between 2012 and 2015 they increased by a shocking 253%<sup>1</sup>.

The singling out of Islamophobia does not diminish the importance of all forms of systemic discrimination and discrimination but rather, it is recognition of the current ground realities and an important signal that the government recognizes the urgency of the situation.

There has also been significant and unfounded, fear-mongering regarding the usage of the term Islamophobia in the motion and in the work of this Committee. Islamophobia has been defined in a clear manner by leading human rights institutions in the Western world and in Canada for decades. Islamophobia is hate, hostility, prejudice and discrimination directed towards Muslims. The Ontario Human Rights Commission defines Islamophobia as follows, which the NCCM subscribes to:

"Islamophobia includes racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level."

Of course all terms have limits and Islamophobia is no different. From various viewpoints its limitations could be identified, but it would be unacceptable to expect that the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/3523535/hate-crimes-canada-muslim/>

term Islamophobia should be held to a higher standard of clarity than other equivalent terms such as anti-Semitism. It has a clear meaning and it has gained wide usage both inside of Canadian Muslim communities, and in the wider society, for many years.

### **The Impacts of Hate Expression & Discrimination**

Hate expression in Canada is only limited by Criminal Code provisions which establish a very high bar for conviction and by human rights legislation which prohibits discrimination and harassment in limited domains of life such as employment, housing, and services. Outside of these fairly narrow contexts hate expression is perfectly legal in Canada.

However, hate expression and racism are not harmless. Many studies have demonstrated that such expression undermines the mental health and well-being of groups affected, and contributes to the alienation of members of these groups. Hate expression and racism are a major contributor to experiences of discrimination and harassment. Stereotypes and prejudices fanned by such expression influence the behaviour of many and can be connected to experiences of discrimination in settings covered by human rights legislation. Although hate expression outside of its identified legal limits is legal and a necessary consequence of the protection of free speech, it must be understood that it is toxic to the social cohesion of Canadian society, and that it places tremendous burdens on targeted minority groups.

### **L'islamophobie au Québec**

Je travaille dans les communautés musulmanes du Québec depuis plus de 15 ans et j'ai été témoin des barrières de l'acceptation sociale mais aussi des progrès des QuébécoisES musulmanEs.

Soyons francs : malheureusement, pendant des années, on a parlé des musulmanEs qui ont été rabaissé et stigmatisé par les discours politiques, les commentaires publics et médiatiques. Pourtant, les musulmanes du Québec n'ont pas vu leurs points de vue, leurs défis et leurs préoccupations pris très au sérieux.

Pendant ce temps, la montée des groupes d'extrême droite au Québec est devenue très problématique. Le CNMC soutient qu'il existe un lien direct entre l'expression haineuse et la

violence contre les groupes minoritaires. Plusieurs politiciens québécois ont toutefois reconnu que l'atmosphère créée par le discours islamophobe a contribué à l'émergence de la violence contre les musulmanes québécoises, qui a abouti à l'acte terroriste contre le Centre islamique de Québec.

Le traumatisme causé par cet attentat imprègne encore les communautés musulmanes québécoises. J'ai rencontré et parlé avec les familles des victimes, ainsi que la communauté élargie. Les Communautés musulmanes sont extrêmement inquiètes pour leur avenir et surtout celui de leurs enfants. Trouveront ils leur place? Ces types de défis commencent seulement à être reconnus par le gouvernement provincial et par quelques partis d'opposition

Je serais heureuse d'élaborer un peu plus durant la période de question.

### **Key Recommendations**

By way of concrete recommendations to the Committee, the NCCM submits that the following actions and policy steps should be undertaken:

- **First:** Parliament should declare January 29<sup>th</sup> as a national day of remembrance and action on Islamophobia in Canada.
- **Second:** Just as the last federal budget was, rightly, subjected to a gender-based analysis, this lens should be expanded to include a diversity, equity and inclusion analysis. When spending decisions are tied to policy and the rationales that underpin this, they can have far broader reaching impacts than attempting to address social phenomenon after they occur.
- **Third:** The federal government should create an Anti-Racism Directorate within the Department of Canadian Heritage to work with provincial counterparts, such as the Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate. Such a directorate should take the lead in developing a National Action Plan against Racism with adequate funding to support communication, education, and accountability mechanisms around hate expression, discrimination and racism.
- **Fourth:** While Criminal Code restrictions exist on hate expression, little is understood about these both in the wider society and even among police organizations. It is essential that these restrictions are better communicated in the general public and

advocacy efforts in support of their application be enhanced. Additionally, better training about these provisions, their application and their enforcement needs to be provided to police services across Canada.

- **Fifth:** Law enforcement should be required to retain and undertake regular and ongoing training in bias-free policing as well as victim-based approaches to dealing with hate crimes. This should be conducted by adequately trained anti-hate personnel and units or by recognized outside experts.
- **And finally:** Chief among accountability mechanisms and similar to legislation that has just been passed in Ontario, the federal government should pass legislation to require the public service to collect, analyse, act on, and report on disaggregated race data. Most government services still do not collect race-related data of service recipients to identify disproportionate service provision and detect signs of systemic discrimination.

Overall, much work remains to be done but we are confident that, together, Canadians can work to ensure that our country remains a global leader on human rights. Subject to the committee's questions, those are our submissions. Thank you / Merci.