

**Position Paper: January 29<sup>th</sup> as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia**

1. **Canada should designate January 29<sup>th</sup> as a “National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination.”** On January 29, 2017, a lone gunman entered a mosque in Quebec City and opened fire on dozens of Muslim Canadians during a prayer service. By the time the shooting had ended, six worshippers had been killed, and 19 more injured. The January 29<sup>th</sup> Quebec Mosque massacre was the first time in Canadian history where a specific religious group was targeted in their place of worship.
  1. Politicians must respond to the nationwide calls for January 29<sup>th</sup> to be proclaimed as a “National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia and other forms of religious discrimination.”
    - a. *Recommendation 30 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage’s M-103 Report recommends “that January 29<sup>th</sup> be designated as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination.”* This recommendation is the most symbolically significant of all the Report’s recommendations and must be swiftly implemented in order to commemorate the lives lost and educate Canadians as to the deadly effects of racism and religious discrimination.
    - b. *Politicians cannot ignore the overwhelming community support for this call.* In January 2018, dozens of Canadian Muslim organizations and community partners signed onto an open letter initiated by the National Council for Canadian Muslims (NCCM), calling on the government to proclaim January 29<sup>th</sup> as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia.<sup>1</sup> Since then, hundreds of Canadian organizations and academics, as well as over 7000 Canadian individuals, have renewed this call urging the government to commemorate January 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup> As of July 2018, the Ontario cities of Toronto<sup>3</sup>, Hamilton<sup>4</sup>, Markham<sup>5</sup>, London<sup>6</sup>, and Windsor<sup>7</sup> have already designated January 29<sup>th</sup> as a Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia. Moreover, the Ontario legislature is currently in the process of debating Bill 83 – “An Act to Proclaim a Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia.”<sup>8</sup>
  2. Politicians must recognize that this call for a Day of Remembrance and Action is rooted in historical precedence. The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women in Canada is December 6, the anniversary of the murders of 14 young women at l’École Polytechnique de Montréal in 1989. Status of Women Canada declares, “They died because they were women.” In the same way, the six men who died in the Quebec City mosque shooting “died because they were Muslim.” Their deaths should serve as a reminder to prevent a repeat of any such act.
  3. Any commemoration of January 29<sup>th</sup> must include a condemnation of Islamophobia. Canadians understand that the events of January 29<sup>th</sup> were a specific expression of Islamophobia, and as such, any move to commemorate January 29<sup>th</sup> must remind our country of the existence of Islamophobia and challenges faced by Muslim Canadians. Any broader designation dilutes the urgent need for a focus on Islamophobia and risks becoming redundant with existing observations.
2. **Politicians must take the threat of Islamophobia seriously.** While Muslims are not the only religious minority in Canada facing discrimination, Islamophobia has risen sharply in recent years, and six Canadians lost their lives to Islamophobia on Jan. 29, 2017.

1. The political rhetoric must take Islamophobia seriously. When politicians avoid naming Islamophobia, or deny that it exists, that itself is a form of Islamophobia. The M-103 report made clear that prejudice against Muslims in Canada is an ongoing problem as Canada’s Muslim community continues to face a surge of Islamophobic attitudes. In addition, a 2017 EKOS Survey affirmed that most Canadians believe Islamophobia is a problem in Canada. 81% of Canadians recognize that Islamophobia exists in Canada, and 57% agree that it is an increasingly disturbing problem.
  2. Politicians must not turn a blind eye to the Islamophobic currents that run through Canadian society. As made clear in one of the M-103 Report’s “minority report,” some politicians continue to downplay the severity of Islamophobia in Canada and argue against the fact that Canada is experiencing “systemic racism” and a “climate of hate and fear.” These claims distort the reality on the ground – Statistics Canada has shown that between 2012 and 2015, hate crimes against Muslims increased by 253 percent.<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada’s recent police-reported hate crimes report for 2017 confirmed the ongoing challenge of Islamophobia in Canada, revealing that of all targeted groups, Canadian Muslims specifically have experienced the highest increase in hate crimes, with the number more than doubling over the 2016-2017 period.<sup>10</sup>
  3. Politicians need to use their platform to calm, not exacerbate, the strong emotions around religious discrimination. The original M-103 motion stated that, “the government should recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear,” and this attitude should be reflected in politicians’ rhetoric. Politicians must reiterate their appreciation of all people groups in Canada and take visible steps toward educating Canadians about the dangers of xenophobia by publicly designating January 29<sup>th</sup> as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination.
- 3. The government must not question the use of the term “Islamophobia” to score political points.**
1. Politicians should recognize that Canadians understand the term “Islamophobia.” Contrary to the claims of some politicians, results of a 2017 EKOS survey<sup>11</sup> indicated that 70 percent of Canadians are comfortable that they understand the meaning of the term, “Islamophobia.” If we avoid the naming of Islamophobia – popularly understood as hate and bigotry expressed toward Muslims – we facilitate the de-emphasis of this rising form of discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FINAL\\_NCCM\\_Ltr\\_to\\_PM\\_re\\_Jan29-signed.pdf](https://www.nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FINAL_NCCM_Ltr_to_PM_re_Jan29-signed.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/decisionBodyProfile.do?function=doPrepare&meetingId=13088#Meeting-2018.CC36>

<sup>4</sup> <https://muslimlink.ca/news/hamilton-city-council-unanimously-passes-motion-to-recognize-january-29-as-the-day-of-remembrance-and-action-on-islamophobia>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/rememberjan29-canada-islamophobia-muslim-hate-racism-quebec-mosque-attack-national-day-a8184021.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-city-councillor-wants-day-of-action-against-islamophobia-declared-1.4506537>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.citywindsor.ca/cityhall/City-Council-Meetings/Proclamations/Documents/Day%20of%20Remembrance%20January%2029.%202018.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ron Csillag, “Jewish MPP Delivers Call to Action on Islamophobia,” *Canadian Jewish News*, April 17, 2019, <https://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/jewish-mpp-delivers-call-to-action-on-islamophobia>.

<sup>9</sup> Amy Minsky. “Hate Crimes Against Muslims in Canada Increase by 253% Over Four Years.” *Global News*. June 13, 2017. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3523535/hate-crimes-canada-muslim/>.

<sup>10</sup>

<sup>11</sup>In late 2017, EKOS Research Associates conducted a national survey of Canadians to probe for religious discrimination, particularly Islamophobia, in Canadian society. The EKOS survey is accurate within 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. (All survey data is available at <http://cjpme.org/islamophobia>)