

## **CDN PARL COMMITTEE ANTISEMITISM**

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Parliamentarians from around the world met in London in February 2009, to address the issue of anti-Semitism. The result was a resolution, "The London Declaration for Combating Anti-Semitism," which calls on governments to address anti-Semitism.

The eleven Canadian Parliamentarians who attended that conference initiated, in March 2009, the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism. The 22 members, from all federal parties, have adopted the definition of the issue, which includes criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic - because Israel is a "Jewish collectivity."

Our organization was invited to present at a Hearing on Dec 1/09.

This is a very difficult situation, we want to be part of this discussion and yet we are fearful of it for a number of obvious reasons. Some of the Coalition's background writings have already been framed as one of conflict, between Muslims and Israel, which is seen as responsible for anti-Semitism.

How could we express our concerns about the conflation of anti-Semitism and any criticism of Israel without being targeted as being anti-Semitic? We didn't want to become embroiled in the rights and wrongs of the Middle East conflicts.

It was a tense tightrope act, to raise our discomfort without being perceived or labeled as "part of the problem" – because we are Muslim.

CCMW was given five possible questions for the Hearing, and here are some of our responses.

We started with the statement that "we are not speaking here as Canadian Muslims, but rather that we raise these issues as concerned citizens of Canada and of the global community."

CCMW was asked "How does one distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism?"

This is the crux of this discussion.

No matter how some people view a particular state and think a state is treated unfairly, no state should be above criticism. Like religion, a state is not within the purview of human rights nor does it require protection from criticism.

Certainly there are times when some states need defence, but that is a matter of international law, not of racism or discrimination.

The London Declaration says any "calls for the destruction of the State of Israel are inherently anti-Semitic"

I accept the existence of the state of Israel; however this statement intimidates me, because I certainly don't want to be labeled anti-Semitic.

There are Jews, within Israel and in other parts of the world, who are critical of some of the policies and actions of the state. Would it not silence them when a Jewish organization, MASADA, labels them as SHIT –Self Hating Israel Threatening Jews?

Surely any state's actions should be open to questions and challenges.

We have criticized the U.S government for its actions in Iraq, but this does not translate into hatred of Americans as a people. Similarly, we have criticized Saudi Arabia or Iran but this does not in any way mean that we are anti Islam or anti Muslim.

Another example was the shunning of South Africa because of its practice of apartheid, but this cannot be seen as encouraging anti white or anti African sentiments.

We have the example of Quebec some of whose residents wants to secede, and this would dramatically alter and jeopardize the very nation of Canada. But surely we don't see this as a reason to decry the people of Quebec or to take action against the province?

The Coalition wanted to know "Where would you draw the line between free speech and hateful or harmful speech?"

Sociologist Professor Joanne Naiman differentiates between prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice includes attitudes of dislike and hostility toward a group of people. This includes hateful speech. Discrimination is the denial of equal treatment or opportunities to these individuals, and this is harmful.

I add that propagating hate and inciting violence will affect my ability to practice my rights, and will curtail my opportunities for employment or housing or education.

I would like protection from this hatred which would restrict my rights as a full citizen.

We raised the similarities between the aim of this Coalition and the recent U.N Human Rights Council resolution, "Combating Defamation of Religions" of March 2009, which urges the creation of laws in member states to prevent criticism of religions and forms of belief.

If one substitutes the word "states" in place of "religions" the concerns about silencing criticisms become clearer.

As an organization of believing women, CCMW, along with many other organizations expressed concern that the Resolution can lead to silencing and intimidating human rights defenders, religious minorities and other dissenters.

It can restrict freedom of expression because any criticism of laws and customs based on religious texts will be seen as an attack against a religion.

Canada objected by stating that "It is individuals who have rights, not religions [states]. Canada believes that to extend the notion of defamation beyond its proper scope would jeopardize the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which includes religious subjects."

Is it not the same if we extend "racism"- against a people - to include a state?

CCMW was asked what could be recommended to combat anti Semitism in Canada while upholding the right to free speech?

Our response is that we strongly support efforts to combat anti Semitism, as well as all forms of prejudice and discrimination against any individual or group.

My question to the Coalition was: what is the rationale for the formation of such a high powered political committee to combat one form of racism and not address all forms of hate and discrimination?

We recommend that we should be inclusive and start with universal rights, rather than fragmenting Canadians by one aspect of their identities – whether it be religion, race or ethnicity.

Please can we not stand and be counted for justice and compassion for all peoples, whether it be in Nazi Germany, Bosnia, Darfur, or in the Middle East?