



13070-113 Street, Edmonton, AB T5E 5A8

P : (780) 451-6694

F : (780) 452-1243

E : info@alrashidmosque.ca

October 31st, 2022

The Senate of Canada

Senate Committee on Human Rights

Mr. Sébastien Payet

Committee Clerk

Committees Directorate

40 rue Elgin Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0A4

Dear Mr. Payet,

Re: Al Rashid Mosque meeting on Islamophobia in Canada.

It was a pleasure meeting our Honourable Senators and the Senate Committee on Human Rights on September 8, 2022 as part of its study on Islamophobia in Canada.

Al Rashid Mosque is honoured and appreciates the time spent discussing this important and concerning subject matter. Islamophobia, hateful rhetoric and discriminatory policy regardless of where it stems from, cannot go unchecked. Edmonton Muslims have experienced the awful consequences first hand.

As you advised during our meeting, we submit this brief to provide a few details of real life traumatic experiences by our community members and recommendations for consideration to counter act Islamophobia.

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Please find attached testimony from Muna Ahmed who is a Director Al Rashid Mosque, Edmonton. She created a webpage for Edmonton Muslim women to share their stories of Islamophobia. <https://muna28.wixsite.com/muslimwomenedmonton> also attached is testimony from Omar Abdullahi who is a teacher at Queen Elizabeth High School, Edmonton.

Public education: True Islam education portal

It is critical that schools provide safe spaces for youth dealing with the impact of hate; where youth can express their grief and confusion and receive compassionate supports. The objective, here, is to offer affected youth a healthy outlet for their pain and resentment, and to build confidence in their identity as Canadian Muslims, and to resist internalizing hateful messaging about their faith and culture. In the absence of supports, many youth will internalize this pain and subsequent resentment and may resultantly act out in unhealthy ways. Those without adequate family and school supports may turn to drugs and alcohol; others may act out in other negative behaviour, while few may turn to the internet to find answers and become targets for violent, extremist recruitment.

Most educators would agree that we must inculcate a strong resistance to racism and xenophobia in our youth from early on, so that they can live lives centered on concepts of human rights and dignity for all. This is one of the central values of being Canadian, and one of our most important legacies as a nation. In their call for intercultural education, scholars Leslie Ponciano and Ani Shabazian wrote: "As society becomes increasingly multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural, [so too grows the need for educators' abilities](#) to support children's development by instilling in them the tools they need to live together respectfully and stand up to prejudice." It needs to begin at the ground level, reaching out to encompass not only the students, but also the educators, staff, and communities.

Being the first mosque in Canada, we would encourage the Federal government to fund along with Al Rashid Mosque in creating a national one stop True Islam Portal for teachers to access quality approved materials, resources, and professional learning linked to each provinces curriculum to support the implementation of Islam inclusive education.

Al Rashid professional learning for teachers delivering TRUE Islamic education to be provided by Al Rashid and The Federal Government, and should be completed by Primary and Secondary school teachers in Canada.

This one stop True Islam Portal will support teachers and schools to successfully deliver on national policy regarding Islam Inclusive Education in Canada's curriculum, supporting efforts to address the prejudice, stigma, and bullying behaviours often experienced by Muslims with a proactive educational approach

Al Rashid also encourages Federal Government funding to consider programs of outreach and dialogue that will bring people from different traditions and different communities together in order to learn about one another and to work together on issues of discrimination.

Al Rashid Mosque would be pleased to discuss strategies and recommended budgets to achieve these goals.

Security

Al Rashid encourages the Federal government to establish funding for security measures to help keep members of the Muslim community safe in their daily lives.

The funding will provide protective security at Muslim institutions such as schools and Mosques.

Al Rashid Mosque would be pleased to discuss strategies and recommended budgets to achieve our goal of creating a safe place for Muslims.

Summary

In summary, the Federal government approach to Islamophobia needs be a multi staged and proactive approach to curb growing Islamophobia

We believe that Federal and Provincial leaders must speak out about anti-Islam, anti-immigrant sentiment, hate speech and hate crimes, white supremacy and the general tenor of our public discourse.



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We would ask that the Senate Committee consider our recommendations to help stem this un Canadian prejudice against Muslims.

Yours truly,

Al Rashid Mosque,

Khalid Amin

Chairman

Arab Muslim Association

Khalid Tarabain

Chairman

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Testimony #1

To Whom It May Concern:

It is our responsibility to aggressively oppose and combat racism, prejudice, and oppression, especially as a Muslim woman in Edmonton, and as a future social worker, I want to use my power and knowledge to bring attention to this issue and highlight the voices of people who have been affected by Anti-Muslim/Islam rhetoric and violence. Recently, violent racially motivated hate crimes have targeted Muslim women in Edmonton, primarily Black Muslim women. There have been five police reports of incidents involving Black women wearing hijab since early December 2020 (Kestler-D'Amours, 2021), with many more going unreported. I myself can share many experiences throughout my life in Canada. Many of these incidents range from micro aggressions (i.e., are you bald under your hijab, do your parents/husband force you to dress like that, etc.) all the way to violent attacks like the one I experienced in March 2021, when I was spit on and had a bottle hurled at me, but I decided not to report it.

In 2021, with the help of my community I initiated a digital tale crisis in which I share photographs and anecdotes of Muslim women in Edmonton. Working from an anti-oppressive perspective, it was critical for me to take charge of creating a space where community perspectives could be heard. Even though many voices are lacking (e.g., elderly and youth under the age of 18), it's a start. Listening to the experiences, stories, and histories of the impacted groups, as told by them, is critical for social justice. We must also be dedicated to action, which is why I listed ways for people to take action to confront historic patterns of marginalization, oppression, and discrimination in all forms at the bottom of the page. This was not a method of coding social problems as individual struggles, but rather a manner of highlighting the real people whose lives are impacted by hate and violence on a daily

basis. These are not just a few people's subjective experiences; there is a systemic consequence that leads to underrepresentation, racism, and oppression. For example, I've heard "go back to where you came from" multiple times, but this isn't simply a harsh remark directed at me; it manifests itself in discriminatory travel, migration, deportation, immigration restriction, and citizenship policies, such as deporting people who no longer serve us. This is critical to comprehend since addressing the individual attacker is insufficient; instead, the system as a whole must be addressed, especially when the perpetrators are primarily other marginalized people. A point I'd like to make about the perpetrators of these acts, which relates to why I presented my idea in the way I did, is that I decided not to feature the perpetrators in my project since it isn't about them and because the most of them are indigenous, homeless, or have mental health and addiction difficulties. This is similar to recent Asian American hate crimes in New York City, where the majority of those charged with hate crimes against Asian Americans last year were Black or Hispanic. Attacks on one disadvantaged group by another oppressed group should not be used to further police those communities; rather, we need to grasp the complexities of these situations and colonization as the root cause of oppression, not merely racism. Whiteness and White supremacy are the underlying issues, and when disadvantaged people crave this proximity to whiteness, it is easy to become both a victim and an oppressor. And this was a tough concept for me to accept since, on the one hand, it is people like me who are being assaulted, but on the other hand, the situation is the result of institutionalized oppression. When I realized that the victimized and perpetrators were on opposite sides of the same coin, the coin being oppressive structures, I saw that the same system that oppresses and polices individuals and various groups also allows marginalized people to oppress and police one another, and it is the system we need to change for lifelong change.

I want anyone who visit the digital platform to understand the importance of taking action. It is not enough to read these stories and empathize with these people; we must take action. In anti-

oppressive practice, action is a crucial component. This is why I requested participants to share how they are fighting oppression, some in photographs and others in words, in order to highlight that these individuals are fighting oppression and that we can too. On the page, I included a call-to-action checklist as well as suggestions for how we might stand up and act. The checklist includes links that allow people to reflect on and work to unlearn their personal biases, that identify unjust norms, understand Muslim people's history of oppression – particularly that of Muslim women – other groups they can connect with, and last steps they can take to message leaders to address macro-level practises and policies. Social justice is nothing more than a pipe dream without action.

Therefore, here I am completing one of those items on the checklist, connecting with leaders to address practices and policies that enable anti-Muslim rhetoric to grow in Canada, rhetoric that leads to murders of families like in London, ON, leads to mosques being vandalized, and women being attacked. Overcoming this rhetoric requires people to share not only within our Muslim groups but in other groups as well.

Muna Ahmed

Board of Directors at Al Rashid Mosque

Testimony #2

To Whom It May Concern,

During my post-secondary education, when Islam and Muslims came up in the discussions, the narrative was divisive and Islamophobic. I was often considered a spokesperson for Islam. I was expected to be responsible and was called upon to condemn any terrorist attacks and defend my faith. It was mentally exhausting for me because I knew these damaging narratives repeated in the media had a very strong hold on the societal psyche. I once defended why Muslim women wore the hijab. "In the same way that Virgin Mary wears the veil in all the pictures in the church, so do Muslim women," I told the class. Both the veil and the hijab symbolize meekness and humility, as well as submission and obedience to Jesus Christ and Allah. In fact, the way a nun and a Muslim woman dress is literally the same. So why do we discriminate against one group of women while respecting another? " The entire class was deafeningly quiet. After that day, the professor would ignore me, and I believe my grades suffered in that class.

When I became a social studies teacher in the public system, some of my non-Muslim students would regurgitate the same hatred and rhetoric found in popular media that often distorts the lived experiences of Muslims and Islam in their essays. I once had a grade 11 student write about how Muslims are violent and how we can't trust them in Canada. I was shocked. After consulting with my mentor-teacher about what to do, I had a conversation with the student.

To make matters worse, Islamophobia in popular culture is reinforced in textbooks. Our social studies textbook here in Alberta ignores the history of the early Muslims that came to Canada over a hundred years ago. The consequence of this "othering" is that it reinforces the idea that Muslims are not part of Canadian history. Also, anytime Muslims are discussed in social studies textbooks, it's in relation to colonization or violence. It's about time we changed this narrative. I want to see our textbooks reflect how Muslims made major advancements in astronomy, zoology, geography, arithmetic, navigation, art, architecture, and technology.

Omar Abdullahi, B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.
Teacher & Department Head EPSB

