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Via E-mail

SENATE OF CANADA
Standing Committee on Human Rights (RIDR)
Parliament of Canada
Ottawa

Attention: The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Chair

And the Honourable Senators Arnot, Gerba, Jaffer, Manning and Omidvar

Honourable Senators,

Re: Proposed Solutions for Combatting Islamophobia in Canada

Following my attendance before your committee (RIDR, October 24, 2022) to testify on the subject of Islamophobia in Canada, I have been reflecting on your question about solutions. This response is in request to the Chair's invitation to follow up with any further submissions.

My focus, you may recall, was to broaden the lens to frame the issue in terms of **human dignity**. I found it helpful to consider the root causes of Islamophobia as various manifestations of the loss to dignity, and therefore my approach is to ground solutions in terms of strengthening dignity.

In my presentation, I had underlined the distinction between **attitudinal** and **systemic** barriers to preserving and enhancing the respect for human dignity.

Among the **attitudinal** barriers, and adopting the Aga Khan's parlance from his Évora University speech in 2006, I had emphasized ignorance, arrogance and insensitivity, as undermining human dignity. I had given examples of how false stereotypes about Islam and Muslims play into Islamophobia, stressing how (again, to cite the Aga Khan) 'knowledge gaps' can lead to 'empathy gaps'. Among the examples I had cited were:

- ignorance of the basic facts about Islam, its peaceful ethos, its history of pluralistic tolerance, its diverse cultures and demography, its humanistic tradition, and its rich civilizational contributions
- misunderstandings and distortions about terms such as 'sharia', 'jihad' and 'hijab'
- the conflation of politics and culture with religion, to the latter's detriment
- the false attribution of unrepresentative behaviour by some Muslims as representative of Muslims and Islam in general

I had also noted how **systemic** mechanisms, some through anti-Muslim organizations, feed the false stereotypes that create and sustain Islamophobia, citing examples in politics, journalism and elsewhere.

The antidote to these attitudinal and systemic barriers will, in my respectful submission, require a combination of educational initiatives and protective ring-fencing to protect human dignity.

The four solutions I recommend are:

- **Education:** providing political support for legislating educational and curriculum changes in K to 12 teaching so that the basic facts about Islam and Muslim civilizations and about concepts such as 'sharia', etc., are understood.
- **Representation:** initiating governmental policies to encourage greater diversity and better representation of Muslims and subject-matter experts on Islamic culture and societies within policy-influencing systems such as governmental bodies, educational institutions, journalism, and civil society groups.
- **Free Speech and Dignity:** through legislative policies, expressly tethering free speech to human dignity, and prescribing deterrents for transgressions that violate dignity.

- **Advocacy:** more prominent and better articulation by politicians and other public servants of the relevant issues and of attitudinal barriers towards Islam and Muslims, to publicly counter distortions when they come up in policy contexts, so that the general public can become better informed on these matters.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. I am open to assisting you further, should you wish.

This comes with my best wishes to you for the New Year.

Yours truly,

M. Ali Lakhani

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