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Chair: Ms. Lena Metlege Diab



Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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• (0820)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.):
Good morning, everyone.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 105 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on March 21, 2024, the committee is continuing its study on Islamophobia.

[*English*]

Before I begin, I want the members and witnesses to please ensure that both your English and French translations are working so that our meeting is not interrupted.

If you're not sure how to use the interpretation, send a message through the clerk, and they will get somebody to call you if you're not here in person. If you're in person, we have resources here in the room to make sure that

[*Translation*]

Interpretation in English is available when I speak in French.

[*English*]

I want to remind members and participants in the room of the following preventive measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from the microphone at all times. If you do not need them because you are speaking both English and French, keep them unplugged, please.

If you do need them, you plug them in. When they're not in your ear, there's a mark on the table. Please ensure that the earpiece is placed face down on that piece of paper beside you so that there's no disruption.

Consult the card on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. These are in place for safety purposes for everyone. Thank you for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

Connection tests for all witnesses have been done in advance of the meeting.

Today we will have two panels of three witnesses each.

For our first panel, we have with us in person, representing the National Council of Canadian Muslims, Stephen Brown, chief executive officer.

We have virtually, representing the Center for Countering Digital Hate, Imran Ahmed, chief executive officer and founder.

We have, representing the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, Ms. Samya Hasan, executive director.

I will now ask each of the three representatives to begin their opening comments for five minutes each.

I will remind everybody—not just our witnesses, but the members—to please be patient. We conduct our meetings here very peacefully and in order. When I raise the 30-second mark, please take a look at that. When your time is up, I will raise that, if need be. If you're a member, I will cut you off, so don't let me do that, please. If the witness needs a few more seconds to answer, I'll be lenient.

Thank you so much to everybody for your co-operation. I notice that a number of members are new to our committee, so welcome.

We need to be voted the most respectful and most collegial committee on the Hill. Thank you so much to everyone. I definitely intend to keep that.

I will now begin with Chief Executive Officer Stephen Brown, who's here in person .

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stephen Brown (Chief Executive Officer, National Council of Canadian Muslims): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable members.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee.

I begin by suggesting that we had originally stated on the record that we were not going to participate in the committee. That's because certain members of the committee who sat here have been complicit in furthering the problem of Islamophobia.

For example, a Liberal member shared content from the past leader of the Jewish Defense League, which is a terrorist organization listed by the FBI and a group linked to the Kahanists, which is a listed terrorist entity here in Canada. This member is well aware that he trafficked this content and has never apologized for doing so. Our hope is that the committee recommendations include, in part, the recognition that some committee members themselves have hurt, not helped, the struggle against Islamophobia.

Indeed, Islamophobia is a dangerous form of hate that has led to the murder of Canadian Muslims. More Muslims have been killed in targeted hate attacks in Canada than in any other G7 country in the past seven years because of Islamophobia. For example, there was the Quebec City mosque attack that took the lives of six worshippers in January 2017.

This month we honour and remember the victims of the London terror attack, in which a terrorist, motivated by hate for Muslims, mowed down with his truck a family on a walk, murdering four beloved community members and leaving a young boy orphaned on June 6, 2021.

In our sacred places of worship and in public spaces, Muslims in Canada are not safe from violent Islamophobia. This is to say nothing of the many recent attacks that have happened across Canada that could have easily resulted in fatalities.

• (0825)

[*Translation*]

Apart from violent Islamophobia which has terrorized this country for almost a decade now, the Muslim community, specifically in Quebec, faces blatant systemic Islamophobia enshrined in Quebec law.

Let me be clear. Since 2019, the Quebec government has been legislating discrimination. The impact of Bill 21, the state secularism law, has caused psychological distress to countless Muslim women, who must now choose between their faith and living in Quebec, a place many call home.

As noted in the report by the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights on the impact of Bill 21, while the direct consequences of this legislation are troubling, the committee was disturbed to hear that it has also indirectly emboldened racist fringe groups and individuals.

[*English*]

In the last few months, there has been a drastic rise in Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism across Canada. In Q4 of last year, the number of such hate incidents across Canada reported to us increased by 1,300%.

Our communities are experiencing unprecedented levels of hate and violence from every level of society, including but not limited to professionals losing their employment or receiving disciplinary actions after calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Muslim women with hijabs attacked and harassed in public spaces, children intimidated at school by staff for standing in solidarity for Palestinian human rights, and peaceful protesters labelled as supporters of terrorism.

Unfortunately, the response that the Muslim community in Canada has been receiving for months from our elected leaders has been duplicitous: One says they care about our concerns, and the other immediately turns around, further spreads misinformation and makes a deliberate attempt to villainize an entire community as hateful and intolerant people.

Simply stated, it's time to face the music: Islamophobia is real. It has killed and will continue to kill if this study is not taken seriously.

We believe this committee has the power and capability to adopt these recommendations before the end of the 2024 parliamentary session.

I would like to put forward three key recommendations.

The first is for this committee to call loudly for their colleagues to stand boldly against Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism and reiterate the need to protect civil liberties in the House of Commons, including the ability to critique foreign governments.

The second is for this committee adopt the Senate recommendations on Islamophobia, and the third is for this committee to move swiftly to recommend that this government incorporate an action plan on Islamophobia specifically as an addendum to Canada's anti-racism action program, one that has a timeline on the Senate recommendations on Islamophobia.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

You were well ahead of your schedule.

We will now go to Executive Director Hasan, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Samya Hasan (Executive Director, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians): Thank you so much for inviting me to speak today.

As mentioned, my name is Samya Hasan. I'm the executive director for an organization called the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians.

I'm joining you this morning from the traditional indigenous territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee and the territories of the Mississauga, also known as Tsi Tkaronto.

Today is a particularly heavy day, as my colleague Stephen has mentioned. It is the three-year anniversary of the London family terrorist attack, and I'm sure the heaviness of today will be felt throughout the day as others like me make their statements.

I grew up in Toronto during the aftermath of 9/11 in some of Toronto's most diverse neighbourhoods. Being in public schools, I had internalized the news that most Muslim communities were going to be portrayed as the bad guys. I spent my entire school life on the defensive, defending my choice to wear a hijab, defending my family against stereotypes or defending my communities against attacks. What I didn't foresee at that time was that the hateful rhetoric would eventually turn into violence and fatalities.

Our organization is a social justice organization that has been doing anti-hate work and anti-racism work for over three decades. We have been actively engaged in anti-Islamophobia work, particularly over the last five years, because we have seen the exponential increase in Islamophobia during this time.

There are three main points that I want to highlight today, based on the work we have done as an organization. First is the importance of educating young people on anti-Islamophobia, using an anti-oppression lens. Second is protecting our communities from online forms of Islamophobia. Third is incorporating anti-Palestinian racism as part of the strategy to combat Islamophobia.

Over the last five years, we've worked with various different school boards, in Ontario particularly, to create anti-Islamophobia strategies for entire boards in partnership with the NCCM, the National Council of Canadian Muslims. We need all provinces in Canada to mandate such strategies for all school boards across the country. Teaching children to be empathetic is a lot more impactful than teaching adults to unlearn the hate and bias that they've been exposed to all their lives.

I understand that there are jurisdictional considerations over education; however, we know that when the federal government wants the provinces to do something, they have the mechanisms, the pressures and the incentives to make it happen. We need the federal government to commit to this, to encourage and work with all provincial governments to mandate the incorporation of identity-affirming, anti-Islamophobia education for all publicly funded schools in Canada.

Second, we know that the recently introduced online harms bill is welcome legislation, especially for organizations that have been doing anti-hate work and online hate work for a very long time. We know that it's welcome in many Muslim communities as well; however, we want to ensure that there are rigorous oversight measures in place that will prevent racialized and Muslim communities from being unfairly criminalized. We know all too well from the post-9/11 experience what happens when Muslim, Black and brown bodies are over-policed. We want to be convinced that this online harms bill will not be abused to continue the oppression of our communities.

Finally, I know that the third point will come up quite often through the course of this hearing. Over the last eight months, we have seen an exponential increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes towards Muslim communities across the country. We have particularly witnessed visibly Muslim women being exceptionally vulnerable to hateful rhetoric, whether it's online or whether it's in real life.

We have also witnessed an interconnectedness of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism in Canada and across the world. We have seen Muslim communities being targeted with Islamophobia because they support the Palestinian people and Palestinian human rights. We can't hide from this fact any longer, and this government needed to address this yesterday. There are no parts of our anti-racism strategy or anti-hate strategies that address anti-Palestinian racism. These strategies must name, define and address anti-Palestinian racism in Canada. We must stop the further dehumanization of Palestinians caused by ignoring their pleas for protection from abuse, hate and violence.

Muslim communities and allies are outraged and broken by the very graphically broadcast genocide happening in front of our eyes. Protests against this genocide have been widely cited as overwhelmingly peaceful, except for a few times when they've been instigated by police or counterprotests.

To our huge disappointment, we've seen the majority of politicians either mis-characterize or wrongfully smear the legitimate advocacy for Palestinians, or stay deafeningly silent. As recently as last week, we saw the shocking silence of our own Prime Minister when newcomers and immigrants were blamed, without evidence, for criminal activities.

● (0830)

If we're going to combat Islamophobia in all its ugly forms, it's imperative for this government to walk the talk first. Our politicians have alienated Muslim communities at great lengths.

I'll end with my final concluding thought with regard to education: I think our politicians also need the same mandatory education as our young people on anti-Islamophobia.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the chief executive officer and founder of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, Mr. Ahmed. The floor is yours.

Mr. Imran Ahmed (Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Center for Countering Digital Hate): Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, thank you for the invitation to speak with you all today.

My name is Imran Ahmed. I'm the founder and chief executive of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, CCDH.

CCDH researches disinformation and hate speech on social media platforms. Our research has shown time and time again that social media platforms and search engines are irresponsible managers of our digital information ecosystem, because their business models have systemic problems that affect the prevalence of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, misogyny, anti-LGBTQ+ and other forms of identity-based hate.

No investigation of the current crisis of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia can be conducted without examination of these platforms' roles. Dealing with one form of hate alone, whether anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, fails to recognize that the systems underpinning the common problem—the rules of these platforms and the poor way in which they're enforced, and their algorithms and their platform design decisions—give advantage to hateful content.

My statement and the accompanying submission is drawn from CCDH's extensive research into Islamophobia and other forms of hate on social media [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. One, it finds that social media algorithms promote and spread identity-based hate and Islamophobia. Two, it finds that financial [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Three, it finds that that social media companies fail [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] hateful—

• (0835)

The Chair: Hold on a minute—

Mr. Imran Ahmed: —and that all online hate has off-line consequences.

The Chair: Mr. Ahmed, can you hear me? Hold on a minute. I've stopped the time here because we're experiencing a few difficulties.

Is there a recommendation from the digital folks in the room?

Just back up to number one and start again. Let's see if I can hear that.

Mr. Imran Ahmed: One, our research finds that social media algorithms promote and spread identity-based hate like Islamophobia. Two, it finds that financial incentives fuel the production of hateful content. Three, it finds that social media companies fail to act on hateful content when it's reported to them. Four, it finds that online hate has off-line consequences.

Is that okay?

The Chair: It is okay, yes.

Mr. Imran Ahmed: On one, algorithms and recommender systems are the functions that rank and organize content on social media platforms, and they present it in users' feeds based on how likely each individual is to engage and interact with it. That sounds innocent, but CCDH research has shown a strong relationship between these algorithms and the promotion of hateful content, because the design of these algorithms prioritizes attention and engagement, and incendiary content like identity-based hate is privileged [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] being broadcast to more people [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] than content about [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

On two, these were commenced to operate alongside. In “Hate Pays”, CCDH shows that social media accounts used the Israel-Gaza conflict to grow and profit [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] en-

gaging hate content by turbocharging their follower growth, visibility and revenues.

Specifically, we found that accounts that began posting hateful anti-Semitism or Islamophobia in the aftermath of the attacks on October 7 grew four times faster, on average, than before the attack. This quantified how bad actors are able to exploit conflict to grow their following, disseminate hateful messages and potentially profit from this hate.

On three, the irony is, of course, that all platforms have rules about hateful content on their platforms, but again and again, CCDH has shown how the platforms failed to act on Islamophobia when it was reported to them. In our 2022 report, “Failure to Protect”, CCDH showed that Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube failed to act on 89% of posts containing anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobic content reported to them.

Our researchers used platforms' own reporting tools to flag 530 posts that contained disturbing, bigoted and dehumanizing content that targets Muslim people through racist caricatures, conspiracies and false claims. They've been viewed 25 million times. There were hashtags such as #deathtoislam, #islamiscancer and #raghead. Content spread using the hashtags received at least 1.3 million impressions, and 89% of the time, even when told about it, they did nothing.

Finally, on four, online hate has off-line consequences. Social media companies have failed to act on any of the matters identified by CCDH, and these systemic failures have now been recognized as a factor in hate-motivated attacks around the world, from Christchurch to Pittsburgh. These overt acts of hate in the off-line world materialize social media's failings and highlight the significant stakes.

Toxic communication is not simply an unavoidable occurrence in the digital town square, but rather a product of the social media business model and the financial incentives they create, with fundamental off-line consequences.

To conclude, CCDH supports the standing committee in undertaking this inquiry and believes that any solution to the blight of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish hate in Canada must address social media platforms' role in amplifying and distributing identity-based hate.

The Chair: Thank you much.

We will now begin with our first round of members' questions, for six minutes each.

We will commence with MP Moore.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Thank you Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us this morning for this study and for their testimony.

We also recognize that this is the third anniversary of the tragic taking of four innocent lives. That is not lost on us.

I do want to ask a question that's related to that. I'll ask you, Mr. Brown.

In 2022, the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal from the Quebec Court of Appeal concerning consecutive periods of parole ineligibility that were to be served by the man who entered the Great Mosque of Quebec in January 2017 and killed six innocent worshippers. That law was in place in Canada. Prior to a change in the law, there was a sentencing discount for mass murderers. In other words, if someone killed one person, they would receive 25 years of parole ineligibility. If someone killed three people, as was the case—the anniversary was this past week—when the individual shot three Mounties in Moncton, they would receive 25 years of parole ineligibility.

When we were in government, we brought in a change to the law that valued each life, so there were consecutive periods of parole ineligibility. For example, the individual in Moncton received three consecutive periods of parole ineligibility, or 75 years. That was challenged in the case of the mosque shooting. We heard from victims' families on what that law meant to them after losing a loved one in such a horrific way. One member told our committee she was able to take solace in the fact that her daughter would not have to attend parole hearings every two years to try to keep the individual behind bars. On May 27, 2022, the Supreme Court struck down consecutive periods of parole ineligibility and returned the law to what it was prior, so that even in a case of mass murder—like what took place in London, like what took place in Moncton, like what took place in Quebec City—an individual can only receive 25 years of parole ineligibility.

I want to get your thoughts on this. The federal government has not responded to the decision in any way or tried to frame any type of response. Obviously, I feel that they should, but I want to get your thoughts on it, on valuing each of those lives.

• (0840)

Mr. Stephen Brown: Thank you very much, MP Moore.

The Quebec City mosque shooting in 2017 was one of the most difficult times in history for our community. The tragic thing about it was that this was not the first time the mosque had been attacked. Leading up to the terrorist attack that happened in January, there were many, many attacks on Muslims in Quebec City, specifically targeting the mosque. The response from politicians and the media, quite frankly, was shameful.

For example, a dead pig carcass was placed in front of the mosque. The radio shock jocks, one of whom is currently a leader of a party in Quebec, basically said, "What's the problem? There's nothing illegal with putting a pig carcass in front of a mosque."

The mosque was a victim of hate. There were far-right-wing marches that were organized around the mosque. All of these things were reported to the authorities. The authorities did nothing, and, as a matter of fact, anti-Muslim rhetoric continues to rise in the province.

Then somebody showed up at the mosque and gunned down six people and everybody acted completely surprised. I remember being around at that time and talking to members of the Muslim community and members of the Quebec Muslim community, and the sad thing was that people were not surprised. The mosque had already started looking at how they could improve the security of the mosque because it kept getting attacked.

I remember going to the mosque and seeing a room full of children who were reciting traditions from our religion that talk about how tragedy happens to human beings, but only God, at the end of the day, truly knows the wisdom in those actions. I remember talking to people who still can't go to pray at the mosque because every time the door is behind them, and it's impossible for them to focus on praying because they're terrified that somebody's going to come in the back door. Even to this day when I show up at the mosque in Quebec City, people have to let me in.

To answer your question, the Muslim community was hoping and is still looking forward to this person spending the rest of his years behind bars. That being said, the Supreme Court rendered the decision that, as you've said, made him eligible for parole after 25 years. We respect the decision of the court, but we will be there every two years at his parole hearings to ensure he never leaves prison, and we are against the use of the notwithstanding clause to enforce back-to-back sentences.

• (0845)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to member of Parliament Mr. Zuberi, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here in person and online today. Thank you for joining us. We recognize your strength, courage and advocacy, especially around this three-year mark of the tragedy in London, Ontario, where the Afzaal family was so hurt, the London community also was hurt and lives were lost.

I want to talk about the lessons that we have or haven't learned.

We today are marking three years of the Afzaal family's passing and the impacts that happened to the community there in London, Ontario. We'll fast-forward to today.

Just last week, here in Ottawa, in what isn't necessarily a unique situation, there was an assault that happened. A man was captured on video punching a woman in the face, knocking her to the ground, if I remember correctly. This lady was specifically protesting, from all appearances, what's happening—and her objection to what's happening—within Gaza. Do you have any comments on that situation in terms of that assault and the aftermath of it?

Mr. Stephen Brown: Yes.

Just days ago, a man physically assaulted a woman, a Muslim wearing her hijab, who was peacefully protesting right here in Ottawa, outside the EY Centre. He walked up to her and struck her to the ground. She was taken to hospital for treatment for her severe injuries.

Quite frankly, it's incidents like these, among others, that are very concerning and are creating space for more blatant Islamophobia to occur.

Another woman had her hijab torn off and was verbally accosted by another woman.

Even at the beginning of this week, at an advocacy event, one of our own board members at NCCM was accosted by a man, close to Queen's Park, because she's a woman who wears hijab.

These sorts of incidents are happening with alarming frequency in Canadian streets. It just goes to show that right now there is a real problem with Islamophobia. For some reason, people feel that it's okay to accost Muslim women in the street who are wearing a hijab.

That's why I go back to our recommendations. It's so important for members of this committee to stand up and clearly denounce Islamophobia. It's really important to look at the recommendations made by the Senate committee and it's important to adopt these so that we can move towards actually making sure that all members of our society, including Muslim women, can safely walk the streets in Canada.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

You referred to the Senate committee report more than once. I'd like to know, aside from our adopting all the recommendations, whether there are any you want to highlight in particular.

If not, I have other questions.

Mr. Stephen Brown: No, I think it would be good to look at all the recommendations. They should all be adopted.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I recognize how that was a very in-depth and extended report that took the Senate the better part of a year to conduct. Our memories are often short. I became an adult in the early 2000s. I became an adult after 2001.

• (0850)

[Translation]

In 2001, I was in university.

[English]

This impacted me a lot, from my public engagement and throughout my adulthood until today. I look back at that period and

I recognize how that impacted my trajectory, but I didn't realize it at the time. I remember some of the conversations we were having in the decade immediately after 2001, and I remember that you mentioned what's happening in some provinces in the country. That is an important conversation.

I also remember that at the federal level, when the last government, the Conservative government, was running an election, there was gross maligning of Muslims and there were caricatures being put forth. Every other day you would see a niqab-wearing person on the cover of a paper or in some cases being referred to in almost every stump speech by the Conservative Party in the election campaign.

I recognize that people change and grow. I want you to comment, Mr. Brown, on the importance of elected officials' being very mindful of how they talk about minorities. I recognize how, when in 2015 our government came in, we were very careful to make sure we didn't malign communities just to score political points.

Please go ahead, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Stephen Brown: Yes. I remember being around at that time and watching how those comments negatively impacted society. I mean, my name is Stephen Brown, and I don't look like I'm from South Asia or western Asia, so I heard everything that people had to say about Muslims and Arabs at that time.

However, the fact of the matter is that it wasn't just then. There are issues now as well. For example, Marco Mendicino shared content from Meir Weinstein. This is not a one-party issue; this is a multi-party issue. All elected officials need to take this issue seriously. I suggest that all members of this committee look carefully at our recommendations and adopt them.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses with us this morning: Mr. Brown and, by video conference, Mr. Ahmed and Ms. Hasan.

Islamophobia is an important and serious issue. I'm proud to be a member of this committee, which has decided to hear witnesses and report on the situation. Like my entire party, the Bloc Québécois, I believe that all forms of hatred should be rejected, that living together in harmony means respecting one another, regardless of religion, race, colour, political, cultural or other opinion, sexual orientation or gender. All that belongs to each and every one of us and we must, in my opinion, live with respect for each other's unique identity. Obviously, we reject all forms of hatred.

That said, I've heard the comments made regarding the issue of online hate. Of course, as you know, we're already looking into that issue, and a bill is currently being drafted.

My party, the Bloc Québécois, has tabled a bill to remove the religious exceptions set out in the Criminal Code. In a nutshell, the Criminal Code prohibits the promotion of antisemitism or hatred, but provides for exceptions, two of which state that, if it's based on a religious text, it can be done. I'll spare you the details, but in our opinion, it shouldn't exist.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that, Mr. Brown. Should we remove the religious exception set out in the section of the Criminal Code prohibiting the promotion of hatred or should we keep that exception?

Mr. Stephen Brown: Thank you for the question, Mr. Fortin.

First and foremost, any form of hatred is unacceptable. I would say that especially hate that is encouraged by governments is even more unacceptable. For example, Quebec's Bill 21, the state secularism law, is literally a form of hatred that targets minorities and seeks to take away the rights of citizens.

I'll answer your question, but I think it's important to say that many political parties are selective about the type of hatred they condemn. The purpose of these committee meetings is to identify measures to reduce Islamophobia and to pursue a line of questioning that implies that religious discourse itself is the source of hatred.

Frankly, it's not only problematic, but also emblematic of the need to hold these hearings.

● (0855)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Brown, I don't mean to be rude, but you know that our time is limited.

Did I understand correctly that, in your view, the religious exception in the Criminal Code is a good thing and should be retained? Do you think it's right to promote hatred on the basis of a religious text?

Mr. Stephen Brown: I never said that promoting hatred was acceptable. As for the applicability of your bill, I think it's up to legal experts to determine how it could be—

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Yes, you're right, but there are legal experts who are working on this issue and will continue to do so. I just wanted to get your opinion, but, of course, you don't have to give it to me.

I'd like to come back to the issue of Bill 21, which you mentioned. Obviously, this is the federal Parliament, and the Quebec legislature doesn't concern us. Nonetheless, I'd like to hear what you have to say about the principle. From reading Bill 21, my understanding is that it's relatively simple. It states that everyone is free to practise the religion of their choice and to display whatever religious symbols they choose, regardless of whether they belong to the Jewish community, the Muslim community, the Christian community, the Catholic community or whatever. However, the state must keep its nose out of it, if you'll pardon the expression. The state must remain neutral, it must be secular. This means that the people representing the state—police officers, judges, teachers and so on—must not display a religious preference, so that the people who come into contact with them feel perfectly at ease displaying

their own religious preference and have no fear of being discriminated against as a result.

I don't remember how you phrased it, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but can you explain to me in what way the act implies, in your opinion, hatred by the state or amounts to hatred by the state?

Mr. Stephen Brown: Yes, thank you very much.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have for my answer?

The Chair: You have time.

Mr. Stephen Brown: All right, thank you very much.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: You won't necessarily get a minute; however, I have one minute left to ask my questions.

I'm all ears.

Mr. Stephen Brown: First of all, it's important to say that the so-called state secularism act should first and foremost be called an act to ban the hijab. According to Quebec's premier, it has nothing to do with secularism. As François Legault said in an interview with Patrice Roy, the real reason for passing it was that, sometimes, you have to give the majority something.

What did the Premier of Quebec give the majority? Chocolate bars? No, he was giving away our rights. You know what else he said? He said he was doing it because there were racist people in society. So, according to what the Premier of Quebec said in an interview with Radio-Canada, his government passed Bill 21 to appease racist sentiments and take away minority rights. What's more, the same law stipulates that the state must be neutral, that crosses on top of schools are acceptable, that crosses in hospitals are also acceptable, but that people themselves must be neutral. What exactly is a neutral human being, Mr. Fortin?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Brown, my time is up.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you for your testimony.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Garrison, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today, and in particular on this day, which is a difficult one for the Muslim community around the country, and particularly in London. I would like to acknowledge once again that we were privileged in our first session to hear from family and friends from London who talked about the real impacts of Islamophobia on everyday life.

I want to thank Mr. Brown for drawing our attention to the Senate recommendations, and I want to also thank Ms. Hasan for drawing our attention to silence as well as words. I think the point she made is very important, the point that silence often speaks volumes.

I want to turn my questions to Mr. Ahmed. I think it's clear to all of us that identity-based hate is not new, but the phenomenon of the way it's treated on social media is something new.

I have two questions.

First, in your research, have you found that social media have assumed the primary role in promoting hate? Second, who is the hate most likely to be promoted to in online media?

● (0900)

The Chair: Mr. Ahmed, you are having difficulties. We will bear with you because I've been informed there's nothing we can do in the room.

Go ahead. Hopefully you're not frozen.

Mr. Imran Ahmed: Social media, for better or for worse, has become the primary means by which we share information, by which we negotiate our values and by which we negotiate even the corpus of information that we call facts. It has become the main means by which we set our norms of attitude and behaviour. As such, it has a resocializing effect on the off-line world such that with the heightened prevalence of hate and the lies that always underpin hate—lies and hate are inextricably interlinked—what we see is a growing normalization of hateful ideas and hate speech itself.

To address the second part of your question, I think the real issue that we have with the growing prevalence of hate is that it's fed to the people who are victims, and they engage with it. It therefore makes the world seem more hateful and it leads to polarization as a result. It's also fed to the people who have shown some interest in it before, but the truth is that it's also fed to just normal members of the public and therefore has that resocializing effect as well.

Through all three elements, whether it is terrorizing Muslims, encouraging people who hate Muslims or making the general public feel that most people hate Muslims, it has [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] but nevertheless highly pernicious effects.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I think one thing we're all focused on with this committee is finding practical things we can do. The online media giants have proven remarkably immune to attempts to get better behaviour from them.

When you talk about financial incentives, do you see any practical things that governments could do to reduce the ability of online media to profit from online hate?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: Pass comprehensive transparency legislation that opens up the algorithms and opens up their content enforcement policies on how they take decisions, such that if content is taken down or left up, you know what rule they've applied and how they've assessed it. As well, create transparency on the advertising. That is the main reason that social media exists: We are the cattle. Users are the cattle on social media. We're the eyeballs for the real customers, which are the advertisers. We need to have more transparency on how the demands of advertisers affect the way that they present information to us.

Second of all, you need to hold them accountable more effectively, but you can only do that once you have transparency.

Finally, you need to have means for individual and societal recourse or ways to impose costs on these companies if, in their negligence, they cause harm to be dealt to a member of the public. If you are the victim of an attack by someone who was radicalized by being bombarded with hate content online, you should have some way of holding the media accountable.

At a systemic level, Canada should have the ability to tell them to clean up their act or it will impose costs on them for their failure to act. With social media, we have a crisis of inaction by those companies. They feel no pressure. It's time to ratchet up the pressure.

The European Union has passed a Digital Services Act. The United Kingdom has passed an Online Safety Act. Both of them have transparency, accountability and economic responsibility for their negative externalities deeply embedded within the logic of how they operate.

● (0905)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Have you seen in your research any examples of advertisers taking any responsibility for the connection of their ads to the promotion of hate?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: We did a study, when Elon Musk took over X, that went on the front page of The New York Times, which led to him lose \$100 million—he claims—of advertising. I know this because Mr. Musk and the X Corporation then sued us at the Center for Countering Digital Hate for having done the research—for having had the temerity to do the research.

That's another good reason that we need to have transparency: It's to protect those people who are trying to find out what is going on with those platforms.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to our second round with five minutes for MP Van Popta, please.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here with us today to help us navigate through this very difficult and challenging study on combatting Islamophobia.

We're particularly sensitive to the topic today, as it is the third anniversary of the tragic London killings.

Mr. Ahmed, I have been fascinated by your testimony today and also by what I read about you on your organization's website. You were highly critical of social media giants for not delivering on their promise to uphold the Christchurch call to eliminate terrorism and violent extremist content online. You said, as you repeated today as well, that according to your research to date, the social media platforms failed 89% of the time, so they got it right 11% of the time. That's not a good ratio.

My question to you is whether the technology exists for social media platforms to drastically improve this ratio.

In preparing for this committee, I did a little research of my own. Your website pointed me to the term “great replacement theory”, which I didn't know very much about, so I thought I would google it. These are all just ordinary English words—“great”, “replacement” and “theory”—and what popped up on my screen anyways was five or six academic papers and encyclopedic papers explaining what this theory is and being highly critical of it as being racist.

Does the technology exist to distinguish between good uses of the term and bad uses of that term so that people like me, who are just wanting to do honest and open research, aren't cut off?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: We're talking about social media platforms specifically, and what we're also talking about is what action they take when users report hate to them and that hate is banned under their rules.

What we found was that when you report to them, you hold out your hand asking for help. We hold out our hands asking for justice under the rules that are our responsibilities as users; I'm sure you're a responsible man, and therefore you abide by all the rules of these platforms and don't post hate content. We feel those rules and responsibilities are a reciprocal right that we expect others to abide by too, and that we expect the platform that owns them to enforce. We find that 89% of the time, even when hate is reported to them, they take no action.

This is not about technology; this is about the will to act. If they want to get that up to 100%, invest in trust and safety, invest in content moderation and invest in rule enforcement, or tell us the truth: You don't care. However, either way, we're either being gaslit or they are chronically underspending on rules that they claim they want to enforce.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

What role does education play? You have been quoted as saying you want to make sure that people are fully informed and that we help them to produce material that inoculates them against grand themes that underpin new Islamic conspiracies.

Could you explain what that is? What role does education play for individuals?

• (0910)

Mr. Imran Ahmed: There is some evidence that inoculation and education can have a limited effect, both in terms of how effective it is and how long it lasts, on reducing the transmissibility of hate. It gives people protection and a pre-existing set of understandings that help give them resilience against hate content and the lies that underpin hate, but that doesn't change the fact that they are being bombarded.

We have something in our psychology called the illusory truth effect. If we see something frequently, we think it's more likely to be true. That's part of the reason that when we are being bombarded with hate content, we end up concluding there can be no smoke without fire, and we start to normalize hateful attitudes, conspiracy theories and lies.

The great replacement theory specifically is the theory that Jews are encouraging migration of Muslims and Blacks to destroy the white race through intermarriage and interbreeding.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ahmed.

Mr. Imran Ahmed: It's taking the lives of Jews, Muslims and others.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to MP Zahid for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I would like to note that today is the third anniversary of the act of Islamophobic terrorism in London that took the lives of the Afzaal family and shook the Muslim community across Canada. Our London family is in our prayers today and all days.

I would like to ask Mr. Brown to comment on how acts of Islamophobia like this impact the sense of safety and security that members of the community feel in Canada and whether there is a specific example of the increase of the Islamophobic incidents in the past few months.

Mr. Stephen Brown: Thank you very much, MP Zahid.

Yes, as I said before, over the past eight months there's been an enormous rise in Islamophobia across the country. We've seen a 1,300% increase in cases reported to our legal clinic at the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

One of the most egregious examples that came across our desk was that of a young boy whose name is Hamza. He's a Muslim student in a special needs program at a York Region District School Board high school. Hamza was violently attacked by a group of students who were calling him “Hamas” instead of Hamza, among other racist and Islamophobic slurs.

That vicious attack left Hamza bloodied with a fractured nose. He was having difficulty breathing, among other health issues, but the school failed to call an ambulance or respond to Hamza's medical and other needs.

It was after immense frustration with the school's response that Hamza's parents were forced to move him to another school, and this is while the bullies themselves remained in the school. This is just one of many examples of the most vulnerable members of our community paying the price for Islamophobia in our society.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

I'm a woman who wears a hijab. Bill 21 in Quebec is of great concern. Could you please explain to us how Bill 21 creates systemic discrimination?

Mr. Stephen Brown: Yes, absolutely. Bill 21 is a law that was passed with the explicit objective of taking away the rights of minorities. Leading up to Bill 21, there were long discussions in society about basically the discomfort many people faced with Muslim women in particular. Many governments prior to the CAQ had made recommendations to remove people's rights, but it was in 2019 that the Quebec government moved to enact a law that would take away the rights of citizens to practise certain professions.

This is, for me, as a Quebecer and as a Black Canadian, extremely disturbing. I come from a family that has been here for seven generations. When my father was born in 1949, Black people still didn't have the right to go to university and study what they wanted to or work where they wanted to. My grandfather couldn't work at the steel factory in Hamilton because the unions didn't want Blacks.

I am the first male born in the history of my family with the right to work and study where I want to, and I am the last generation of my family to be able to do so, because, once again, the Quebec government passed a law that means that people who look like me and my family are now barred from certain professions because of what we look like.

The Government of Quebec has returned my family to the 1940s. This is happening in Canada. The law was passed using the notwithstanding clause under a gag so that there was no debate at the National Assembly. This was done because the premier of Quebec said in an interview, after he passed this law, that sometimes you have to give a little bit to the majority, because there are racist people in society who are anxious about the way that religious minorities look in the streets.

This is something that our country cannot tolerate. Canada cannot be a liberal democracy if we have one set of rules for one type of people and another set of rules for another type of people based on their identity. There is a term used to describe citizens who have fewer rights than others based on their identity. This technical term is "second-class citizens". That is what Bill 21 has created in our country.

It is this government's responsibility to ensure that a Canadian passport for my family means the same as a Canadian passport for any other Canadian family.

• (0915)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Fortin and MP Garrison, you have two and a half minutes each.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Brown, I'm going to come back to you, if I may.

We have differing opinions on Bill 21, but that debate is for another time, since we only have two minutes.

Over the past few weeks, members of the Jewish community have appeared before the committee. They told us that Jews in Canada were being discriminated against, including by hate groups. Now people from the Muslim community have told us essentially

the same thing. In both cases, I find it deplorable. In my opinion, it should not be happening.

We're looking for solutions. I gather from your remarks that you don't see Bill 21, the state secularism law, as a solution. I'm not sure I understand your position. We believe the religious exemptions in the Criminal Code should be eliminated. We are looking for solutions, in any event, and the ones we've proposed are not perfect. They're certainly not the only ones.

We do need to recognize Islamophobia, but I think we've already done that. Beyond that, do you see a reasonable, effective solution for combatting all forms of discrimination in Quebec and Canada, against the Muslim community, the Jewish community or any other community?

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Mr. Stephen Brown: First and foremost, I never said that secularism or the separation of religion and state wasn't integral to our society.

I want to make it clear that, in any liberal democracy, it is fundamental that there be a separation between religion and the state, to ensure that all people, whatever their creed, are able to express differences of opinion. That is just basic. That is why we need open secularism, to ensure that secularism doesn't essentially become an anti-religious tool.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'm watching the time, and we have 30 seconds left. I just wanted to give you a heads-up.

Mr. Stephen Brown: Of course. That is part of our recommendations. First and foremost, we have to focus on education.

As I said, I come from a family where my father and grandfather faced far more discrimination than I do. The important thing is to have shared goals, become educated, come together and obey the laws of the land so that no one is a victim of hate. Those who utter hate speech must be held accountable for their actions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to return to Mr. Ahmed.

A feeling that's often expressed is that the Internet is a marketplace of ideas and those kinds of things. In the research of your organization, which I know is quite extensive, did you find that there are certain groups that are exploiting the weakness of companies in responding to online hate? Are there organized groups out there using the weakness of the response to promote hate?

• (0920)

Mr. Imran Ahmed: In short, yes.

There are people who do it for ideological reasons, because they want to encourage hate. There is now a growing cadre of people who do it just for profit.

You see, this has never been about freedom of speech. This has been about social media platforms choosing certain kinds of speech to promote and other kinds of speech to not make as visible. We know that they promote hate speech, so we actually have a cadre of people who realize that they can make money out of this by spreading hateful content. It drives not just positive but negative reactions too, and that's crucial. Quite often, the people saying "How dare you?" are actually bringing in dollars to the people who are spreading the hate in the first instance.

I think it's a combination of both of those. This isn't really about a marketplace of ideas; this is about the choices made about who to promote and who not to promote and about the monetization of hatred.

Mark Zuckerberg is younger than I am. He's worth \$100 billion. He's not in the free-speech game; he's in the paid-speech game, in the advertising game.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Can you make some comment on the use of the Internet by white supremacist organizations to promote hatred against both Muslims and Jews?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: Yes. Look, white supremacists absolutely crucially understand that this is an opportunity for them to spread hatred against Muslims and Jews and to play them off against each other. I think what's been so dispiriting about the last nine months since October 7 has been seeing the way that platforms, algorithms and sometimes groups themselves have played the tune of white supremacists, who hate all of us, frankly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As the chair, I want to thank you for appearing in person and virtually this morning, and again I offer my condolences to the families who have their memorial today for the loss they've suffered. Thank you very much.

Please give me a minute to ensure that the three witnesses who are coming to us for the second panel, who are all appearing virtually, are all online.

Thank you very much.

• (0920)

(Pause)

• (0929)

The Chair: We will now start virtually.

Welcome to Dr. Anver Emon, professor of law and history, Canada research chair in Islamic law and history and director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Toronto.

We also welcome Dr. Jasmin Zine, professor of sociology and Muslim studies option, Wilfrid Laurier University. Thank you.

I believe we have a third witness, who is having difficulties connecting because of the headset, but I will acknowledge her pres-

ence, although she may not be able to speak at the moment. If we are able to arrange it for Monday, we will. If not, I apologize. She is Dr. Julie Macfarlane, distinguished professor (emerita) of law.

Let's start, for the first five minutes, with Dr. Emon.

Go ahead, please.

• (0930)

Dr. Anver M. Emon (Professor and Canada Research Chair in Islamic Legal History and Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much, and I wish to thank the standing committee for inviting me today. The clerk has my written submission, to which I added materials that I refer to herein.

My oral remarks will briefly summarize what I have written, and I welcome the discussion thereafter.

I offer two substantive points for this committee's consideration. The first concerns what I consider a category error in this committee's terms of reference. The second is meant to focus on how structural Islamophobia persists in our public and private institutions and should be a point of concern for this committee.

First, I am mindful that this committee's mandate is influenced by the war in Israel and Palestine, and specifically in Gaza. With that in mind, I believe the committee's terms of reference suffer from a fundamental category error. It erases the hatred of Palestine and Palestinians and instead collapses it into the category of Islamophobia. As a historian, I can assure you that Palestinians and Palestine cannot be simplistically reduced to the category of Muslim or Islam.

Nonetheless, as my colleagues and I explain in a primer included with my written submission, Canadians across various professions and educational levels make this category error. I believe this category error creates more room for hate and bias and for stereotypes to proliferate unchecked. The category error mistakes Islamophobia for what the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association calls anti-Palestinian racism, or APR. I fear that this committee's dual focus on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism perpetuates this erasure and exclusion.

If the committee's work perpetuates the category error of mistaking APR for Islamophobia, you run the risk of developing misguided policies, for three reasons. One is that you will overestimate the scope and scale of Islamophobia in Canada and thereby create false positives. Second, you will underestimate and thereby fail to address anti-Palestinian racism in Canada. Third, you will reduce a geopolitical, historical and colonial conflict to a simplistic religious one. This reduction, ironically, will implicate this body in perpetuating retrograde stereotypes of the religious backwardness and unmodernity of Jews and Muslims.

Hence, I recommend this committee to advise the Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat to undertake sustained analysis of anti-Palestinian racism, acknowledge its pervasiveness, and develop and promote resources to combat it.

My second focus is on structural Islamophobia in Canada's public and private institutions.

One limitation in debates on Islamophobia is a limited analysis of how our public and private institutions enable Islamophobia as a respectable policy and bureaucratic practice. I have four examples to illuminate how this takes shape in federal government practices.

As the first one, some of you may know my 2021 co-authored study of CRA audits of Muslim charities. Therein we outline the ways in which Islamophobic bureaucratic analysis is purveyed as respectable governance practice in tax audits.

Second, included in my written submission is a table of contents of the 2023 book *Systemic Islamophobia in Canada, a Research Agenda*, featuring 19 essays by me and my colleagues. Each essay examines aspects of how public and private institutions in Canada purvey and enable Islamophobia.

Third, I'm currently a member of the advisory committee on the charitable sector under the ministry of national revenue. In that capacity, I chaired a working group examining the implication of the Department of Finance's national inherent risk assessment of 2023, or NIRA 2023, on Canada's charitable sector. We found that NIRA 2023 creates the conditions for Islamophobic bureaucratic practice reasoning in its selection of what it calls "high-risk jurisdictions", in its analysis of threat actors and in its assessment of which threat actors use charities as funding channels.

Fundamentally, we raise concerns about the absence of robust charter section 15 considerations in our national security landscape. The report currently sits with the ministry of national revenue. I hope this committee might draw upon that report as you continue deliberations.

In the interests of time, I will skip my fourth example on the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) Act and FINTRAC.

In conclusion, there is no quick fix for structural Islamophobia. My recommendation to the committee is to outline in your final report that structural Islamophobia in Canada's public and private institutions exists, runs deep and must be addressed through the commitment of substantial and sustained public resources.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Dr. Zine, please.

Dr. Jasmin Zine (Professor, Sociology and Muslim Studies Option, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual): Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today.

I'm a Muslim scholar of racism and Islamophobia studies. I am the co-founder and vice-president of the International Islamophobia Studies Research Association, IISRA, which is a global hub for the field of anti-Muslim racism.

I have jet lag this morning since I got back late last night from IISRA's third international conference on Islamophobia, which was held in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We brought together 70 scholars from around the world to address Islamophobia as a global condition.

We held a special session with genocide scholars to consider the deadly parallels between the Bosnian genocide and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, after which we visited the genocide memorial in Srebrenica as a reminder of the deadly consequences of Islamophobia. That is something we know all too well here in Canada, as we are gathered here today on the anniversary of the London terror attack on June 6.

I've been studying Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in Canada for the past two decades. Strikingly, over the past several months, I have felt a profound sense of post-9/11 déjà vu, as the massive scale of Israel's deadly violence in Gaza continues to unfold and the legacy of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as a global project continues.

I wrote a book called *Under Siege: Islamophobia and the 9/11 Generation*, about how Canadian Muslim communities, especially youth, navigated that fraught context when they were cast as radicals, jihadists and potential global security threats. Muslim youth became the new folk devil around which moral panics were manufactured.

However, as I shift from studying anti-Muslim racism in the experiences of the 9/11 generation to examining what the current 10/7 generation of Canadian Muslim youth, especially Palestinians, have faced over the last several months, I can say that the present circumstances are far worse. Over the past two decades since 9/11, Islamophobia has laid the groundwork that makes it easier to collectively label and punish Muslim populations.

The global war on terror has been underpinned by racist ideologies, casting nearly two billion people around the world as violent, fanatical terrorists who threaten democracy, the stability of white nations and western civilization.

For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used racist colonial tropes to strategically dehumanize Palestinians by referring to Israel's deadly onslaught as "a war between the forces of light and forces of darkness, between humanity and animalism."

History has shown how vilifying stereotypes pave the way for disproportionate violence. The continual association of Muslims with terrorist groups breeds hate, division and violence. The tragic murder of a six-year-old Palestinian American boy, Wadea Al-Fayoume, in his home in Illinois on October 14, 2023, and the shooting of three Palestinian-American students in November 2023, who were targeted because they were wearing their keffiyehs, are prime examples of how Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism are deadly, even far away from war zones.

Despite these tragic consequences, Palestinian and other Muslim youth in Canada continue to be labelled as “terrorist sympathizers”. They are confronted with police in riot gear using tear gas and tasers for attending peaceful Palestine solidarity demonstrations, arm in arm with Jewish students on their university campuses.

It's been heartening to see the Shabbat dinners alongside jummah prayers at these encampments, yet the Jewish faculty network and independent Jewish voices were shut out of the anti-Semitism hearings. Surely silencing diverse Jewish voices is anti-Semitic; it is definitely anti-democratic.

As I documented in my book that looked at campus culture in an age of empire, when the 9/11 generation challenged the war on terror, they faced surveillance by CSIS, the RCMP and counterterrorism units on and off campuses. Now that the 10/7 generation is protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza, they face armed police endangering their physical safety on campus, yet the political safety of pro-Israel students on campus is portrayed as more dire than the physical safety of Palestinians, Muslims and their allies, both in Canada and in Gaza.

I want to be clear that we will not allow these hearings to be a distraction from the grave and internationally recognized context of genocide in Gaza. The last several months have been especially traumatizing for racialized Palestinian and Muslim youth. Nevertheless, across Canada and around the world, students have bravely upheld the right to protest injustice and demand that their universities divest from Israeli military interests, despite the violent reprisals they face.

There is a lot of targeting of free speech under the Palestine exception to free speech and the neo-McCarthyist censorship tactics that undermine free expression and political dissent, weaponizing the IHRA's definition of Islamophobia.

I want to talk, though, about what is unique about Islamophobia. Not enough is said about this.

● (0935)

Islamophobia is organized, networked, monetized and orchestrated. There are many examples of this, which I talk about in my book-length report on “The Canadian Islamophobia Industry: Mapping Islamophobia's Ecosystem in the Great White North”.

● (0940)

The Chair: Dr. Zine, just to interrupt you, we'll get back to that during questioning. Thank you very much.

Dr. Jasmin Zine: Okay.

The Chair: We will now start with our six-minute rounds. I will be careful of members' and witnesses' time here.

We will start for the first six minutes with MP Redekopp, please.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I too want to offer my heartfelt condolences to the Afzaal family and to the entire Muslim community. This family, of course, tragically fell victim to a terrible act of terrorism in London three years ago today. This senseless act not only deprived us of precious, innocent lives but also shook the very foundations of our communities, leaving scars that may never fully heal.

The pain and loss experienced by the Afzaal family and countless others affected by other acts of violence serve as stark reminders of the urgent need to confront and eradicate Islamophobia in all its forms.

Even in Saskatoon, we've had incidents like this. In 2021, Muhammad Kashif was out for a morning walk at 5:30 in the morning, and he was attacked. Not only was he stabbed, but his beard was cut, and I know that hurt him very deeply.

These acts are happening right across the country, and it's imperative that we stand united in condemning such acts of bigotry and hatred, reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the principles of equality, diversity and respect for all.

Prior to 2019, my interactions with the Muslim community were limited; however, since becoming an MP, I've endeavoured to cultivate sincere relationships with my Muslim brothers and sisters. I've done this not only in Saskatoon, where I represent the riding of Saskatoon West, but also in Toronto and the GTA, working with other Conservatives to build meaningful relationships within the Muslim community in Canada.

What I've discovered is that Muslim people embody the values of faith, family and freedom, and of course these are basic Conservative values. Of course, Muslims make significant contributions in a very positive way to our community. It's been a very great honour for me to develop relationships within the Muslim community.

Dr. Emon, if we're to reduce Islamophobia, do you believe that we need to encourage the building of relationships between Muslims in Canada and all of the other people groups we have? If so, how do we best accomplish this task?

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I think creating more positive relationships is always a better mechanism than otherwise. In terms of the how, I think that there are many mechanisms for us to do that.

I'm grateful for the government's support of the Muslims in Canada Archives, which we run at the Institute of Islamic Studies. I can say that one of the things we're experimenting with is storytelling through material culture and artifacts that we've now collected. Storytelling offers one way.

Beyond that, and part of what I would like to remind you about, based on my written submission, is that I also think we need to take accountability. I think accountability and a hard look at our own institutions and the policies that we have put into place need to be addressed. I'm happy to provide a brief on some recommendations I've made in other settings relative to that, whether to the federal or provincial governments.

Thank you.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

Do you think that education and awareness initiatives are helpful in combatting Islamophobia?

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I think education and initiatives can be very helpful in this context. Again, the issue is in the how, and how it's centred.

We've chosen, in various ways, to centre the voices of those who have oftentimes been marginalized from our mainstream media. In the Muslims in Canada Archives, for example, we try to centre the voice of Muslims through their artifacts. We oversee a Hearing Palestine program; the idea there is to centre the voices of Palestinian Canadians and others to centre that narrative.

The challenge, of course, is creating the space for centring those voices, and I would hope that we could continue doing that.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

You're well aware, I believe, of Senator Ataullahjan, who's a Muslim Conservative senator. She's dedicated a considerable part of her career to fostering understanding among diverse communities. It was through her leadership that the Senate produced the study on Islamophobia, and I'm sure you've read that.

Several of the recommendations in there dealt with the CRA and their decisions related to the charitable status of several Muslim organizations. I've spoken with several of these organizations and heard first-hand the difficulties they encountered with the CRA.

Dr. Emon, what changes would you like to see within the CRA to ensure that Muslim charities are treated the same as all other organizations?

● (0945)

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I think the biggest challenge with the CRA is that the CRA is a tool or an instrument of a whole-of-government policy regarding national security. One of the challenges I've noticed is that as an executive arm of the tax authority, they're subject to policies from Public Safety Canada, the Department of Finance and so on and so forth.

What I would ask is if it's possible to draw upon the NIRA report that our working group did. One of the concerns I have is that because Muslim charities are uniquely related to the larger world of anti-terror financing, we will really need to start thinking hard about how our national security regimes are also accounting for

policies like GBA+, coming out of WAGE, as well as charter section 15 concerns.

I would hope that the committee would take a look at that working group report with the Minister of National Revenue, which outlines in greater detail how we locate these issues.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Within CRA itself, do you believe there are things that need to be updated and changed, regardless of the whole-of-government side of it?

Dr. Anver M. Emon: As we think about the national security regime and the way it operates in the case of anti-terror financing across 13 to 15 agencies, one of which is the CRA, we would need to think about how units like RAD, the review and analysis division of CRA, and the charities directorate are incorporating section 15 and GBA+ models. They're very good at incorporating FATF recommendations and guidelines, and they're very explicit about it—

The Chair: Thank you very much—

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I think we need the same explicitness.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now go to MP Ehsassi, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and allow me to start off by thanking our witnesses. I have to confess that I found your opening remarks very helpful, in particular the distinction between anti-Palestinian hate and Islamophobia, as well as the need to look at this from a comparative context.

Obviously Islamophobia, regrettably, is alive and well, and it's incumbent upon all of us to take it very seriously, especially on a day like this, the third anniversary of the tragic incident in London.

I will start off with a question for Professor Zine.

Professor Zine, we heard that, arguably, Islamophobia is raging here in Canada more than it is in other jurisdictions around the world and in other G7 countries.

First, would you agree with that? Second, to the extent that this may very well be true, why is that? Could you kindly advise as to what it is that we're not doing sufficiently in Canada?

Dr. Jasmin Zine: I think what was said earlier was that Canada leads the G7 in terms of the kinds of violent attacks that have been perpetrated, deadly attacks, against Muslims. That is something that is unique about what we've seen in Canada.

However, Islamophobia is, as I've mentioned earlier, a global scourge, a global condition, and it has its own sort of national variants and histories and so on that we are seeing. Within that context, there's one thing I mentioned but didn't get to talk about: What is unique about Islamophobia, particularly in Canada and the United States—and elsewhere, but it hasn't been as well documented outside of these two jurisdictions—is the way that Islamophobia is networked and purveyed through various groups in this country. White nationalists, far-right media, Islamophobia influencers, Muslim dissidents, Hindutva activists, pro-Israel fringe-right groups, conservative think tanks and security experts all work together in concerted ways to promote demonizing anti-Muslim campaigns.

That's something I documented in a 250-page report on the Canadian Islamophobia industry. That's something that's unique to Islamophobia as a form of oppression, in that there is an industry behind its promotion. For example, in the United States, the Islamophobia industry circulates a staggering \$1.5 billion through 39 anti-Muslim organizations to promote Islamophobic propaganda. This is something that is unique to Islamophobia. I've documented what those associations and networks look like in this country, and I think that's something to really begin to consider. We need to understand how a form of oppression is constructed and how it operates in order to understand how to intervene in it.

That's why I want to also echo that it is important to look at Islamophobia as intersectional. We've talked about gendered forms of Islamophobia. We heard earlier about a recent attack against a Muslim woman who was protesting. We have a whole history of gendered Islamophobia in Canada, including Law 21 and so on, but Islamophobia is also intersectional with anti-Arab racism, anti-Black racism and anti-Palestinian racism, which itself does warrant specific recognition.

I just wrote an article in *The Conversation Canada* about why APR must be included in Canada's national anti-racism strategy. I want to say specifically that when we talk about Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism was built on the architecture of Islamophobia, but it has unique features that distinguish it and warrant recognition. Examples are denying the Nakba, justifying violence against Palestinians, exerting pressure to exclude or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives and failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an indigenous people with collective belonging and rights in relation to occupied historical Palestine—

• (0950)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Professor.

That's very helpful in terms of identifying the problem, and I very much appreciate that, but as lawmakers, the question of a solution remains for us. What is the solution, and what would you recommend? What would be the measures you think could be very helpful in pushing back Islamophobia?

Dr. Jasmin Zine: As I said, because Islamophobia is intersectional, and because your committee is seeking to gather knowledge and information to make better recommendations to government, I would suggest.... I actually would like to question why there are no Palestinian voices included today, or Palestinian experts. You need to get information from the right sources. Not to hear from Palestinians on this issue is very troubling. It's very troubling there hasn't

been an inclusion of Palestinian scholars and experts. Start with that as you gather your information.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Dr. Jasmin Zine: I also want to say that there were a lot of recommendations put forward in the summit that came out. I believe it was after the June 6 tragedy in London, Ontario, the terror attack. There was a federal Islamophobia summit, out of which maybe a hundred recommendations were put forward by the Muslim community and by organizations. I have no idea as to what became of those recommendations. How many have been adopted? How many have been taken up?

The Senate report puts out recommendations. I've stopped making recommendations because there are a lot out there already. I think we would like accountability as to which one of those will be acted upon.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, MP Ehsassi.

Thank you, Doctor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to continue my fellow member Mr. Ehsassi's line of questioning. As I always say, we are sensitive to Islamophobia. At least I am, and I am sure that the same is true of all my colleagues around the table. We condemn it, and we are looking for solutions. Our approach may be clumsy at times, at least in my case. I don't claim to know the solution, but we're looking for one. I think that's our duty as legislators. That's why you're here today, to help guide us.

Dr. Emon, you hold the Canada research chair in Islamic legal history and serve as director of the Institute for Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto. I'm sure you have looked at the issue from a number of different angles. First, I would like to know what you think the Government of Canada could reasonably and effectively do.

As you know, we have also heard from witnesses over the past few weeks about anti-Semitism. It seems to me that there are parallels between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. I understand that they are not the same thing, since they are directed at two different communities, but the fact remains that they are expressions of hate. Children and teenagers are being threatened or harassed in schools, mosques and places of worship in general. I don't want to just talk about one religion in particular.

I would like to know, first of all, whether there are any useful and reasonable solutions to the problem of Islamophobia. Second, I would like to know whether parallels can be drawn between the various forms of religious hatred, and if so, whether there is a common solution, something that can be done to help eliminate all hate in our society.

• (0955)

[English]

Dr. Anver M. Emon: Thank you for the question.

I am mindful that this is a law-making body at the federal level, so my recommendation might draw upon my written submission, which was targeted towards the federal Parliament. Let me give you an example. It was my fourth example, which I didn't get to.

I am currently studying the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act and the public-private partnerships involved under section 5 of that act to combat money laundering and terror financing.

We know from the Cullen commission in B.C. that anti-money laundering measures aren't really effective through the FINTRAC regime. I am actually interested in the anti-terror financing regime, and my preliminary findings lead me to conclude that the government's regimes for combatting terror financing are little more than crumbling sediments from the moral panic over 9/11. We are over two decades from that tragic day, yet Canada continues to embrace the blunt tools of that era, which had a disproportionate effect on Muslims and whose effectiveness in combatting terrorism is regularly questioned.

One such blunt instrument is the terrorist entities list, but as this body illustrated last year with Bill C-41, tools like the terrorist entities list don't actually account for nuance in policymaking. However, they remain in place as a fearful reminder of the presumed Muslim threat. That would be one example.

I think it was in budget 2022 that you allocated funding to re-think your financial crimes division and how you want to think that through. I would argue that—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Emon, I'm sorry to interrupt. I know it's very rude and I hate to do it, but as you know, we're limited to six minutes each. I've already used up more than four minutes of my time.

I understand the financial issue, but do you feel that something should be done to curb hate against the Jewish community, something that would also be useful in curbing hate against the Muslim community? In our fight against all forms of hatred based on religion, race, gender, sexual orientation or anything else, do you feel that something tangible should be done?

We have a minute and a half left.

[English]

Dr. Anver M. Emon: As an educator, I would think that one of the things that would be very useful—and I think the heritage ministry has a mandate for this—is to increase spending for increased storytelling, which centres the voices of those most affected. Imag-

ining our minority communities, who oftentimes do not get to voice their own stories in the media.... I would be very interested in seeing more funding allocated in that context.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I am digressing, but I would briefly like to hear your opinion on the issue of anti-Semitism. Should we tackle it or not? Should we only address Islamophobia? How do you see the connection between the two?

[English]

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I'm mindful that last week you heard from specialists and scholars on this topic, so I would defer to them. Obviously, the Government of Canada should be tackling all forms of hate, not just one or the other, but I'm not a specialist in that area and I would defer to the experts you brought in last week.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Emon.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and of course, thanks once again to the witnesses for being with us today.

Madam Chair, given that one of our witnesses was not able to appear for technical reasons, I appreciate that you're going to make attempts to make sure that the witness will be able to be with us on Monday. Have I understood correctly what you were saying?

• (1000)

The Chair: It depends on her availability, as well as the availability of the committee's resources and so on. I can't guarantee that for you, Mr. Garrison, just to put that on record, but we'll see what we can do.

Mr. Randall Garrison: What I'm acknowledging is that you will attempt to do so. I was not expecting an ironclad guarantee.

Turning to the witnesses we do have before us, I want to talk with Dr. Zine.

In our last session this morning, which you may or may not have been able to hear, we heard from the Center for Countering Digital Hate about those who literally profit off the promotion of hatred, the promotion of Islamophobia in particular.

You mentioned a 250-page report that you did. I'd like you to say a bit more about whether your findings were that people were literally profiting in financial terms or more generally profiting in terms of advancing their objectives.

Dr. Jasmin Zine: Thank you for that question.

The answer is kind of both.

There are a lot of people who have become careerists when it comes to Islamophobia. They are folks that I refer to as Islamophobia influencers. They have large digital platforms on YouTube and other kinds of social media, where they get a lot of traction and are able to purvey their ideas with a great deal of impunity. That allows them to profit financially from that.

There's been a lot of research done in the United States—and I'd like to see more of that kind of work done in Canada—that follows that money trail. They found in the United States that, as I mentioned, about \$1.5 billion flows through various philanthropic organizations through the use of donor-advised funds that get filtered into about 39 anti-Muslim organizations whose mandates, 24-7, are to promote anti-Muslim conspiracy theories and propaganda.

All of that, as we know, is a breeding ground for Islamophobic violence. Those ideas become part of various echo chambers. They become dog whistles. They get picked up by media, and sometimes by politicians. The ways in which those echo chambers work and the ways they filter into public opinion are very insidious and nefarious.

If you look at public opinion polls in Canada over the last two decades, which I did in my report, you will find very problematic statistics that show us that a lot of Canadians distrust Muslims. I think about a quarter of Canadians.... After Donald Trump instituted the Muslim ban in the United States, 24% of Canadians felt that Canada should do the same. There are a lot of statistics that we put together in the report that look at what Canadian polls tell us about the public sentiment about the Muslim presence in this country.

Going back to your question about who profits from this pervyance of anti-Muslim bigotry, certainly there are political agendas that are advanced because of this. There are independent careers. Folks like Rebel media and others in Canada are regularly putting out content that is promoting anti-Muslim animus. Many of their influencers.... Even the white nationalist Tommy Robinson in the U.K. was funded by the Schulman Foundation in the United States for \$5,000 a month—I think that's the figure—to be an intern at Rebel media.

We see these kinds of flows coming into Canada, but we've not been able to do the forensic accounting to see exactly where that money comes from and where it is going in the way that they've been able to document it in the United States. Those figures there, I'm sure you'll agree, are quite staggering and a cause of concern.

I was able to see that some of those organizations co-sponsored events with Canadian organizations that are part of the Islamophobia industry. You see that support coming in through very tangible ways and through other ways whereby they amplify each other's work and create that wider echo chamber for those ideas to flourish and be part of what was discussed this morning as that illusory truth effect.

If you repeat a lie enough times, people start to perceive it as truth. In a post-truth world where you really don't need facts anymore—it's just appeals to sentiments, and facts become casualties of the post-truth context—those kinds of campaigns are very effective and troubling.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Either in your research or in your personal experience, have you found that attempts to bring the promotion of hatred by so-called influencers to the attention of the media platforms have ever been successful in bringing it to an end?

• (1005)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Dr. Jasmin Zine: When there have been prosecutions, I think that has helped. I think that fighting back against some of these people who have then been charged with anti-Muslim hate speech or hate crimes and so on has probably been most effective, rather than the media outlets themselves, which are problematic in doing anything about changing that.

That, again, is where the hate speech laws are very important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final round will be five minutes with Mr. Van Popta, please.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

Professor Emon, I will start with you with this question.

There were two recent cases in Canada of attacks against Muslim people, solely because they were Muslim. The first is the Quebec City mosque shooting in 2017, where a young man murdered six Muslim men and injured many others. The shooter pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences with no eligibility for parole for 40 years. The Court of Appeal of Quebec declared unconstitutional the section of the Criminal Code giving judges discretion to give consecutive periods of parole ineligibility, as it was contrary to sections 7 and 12 of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

My question isn't about that. My colleague Mr. Moore had a good interchange with the previous panel on that topic, and I think that we have good testimony on the record for that, but this case is also notable for what it did not do, which is that the prosecution decided not to pursue terrorism charges but only murder charges.

The terrorism provision was added to the Criminal Code after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, and it defines terrorism as, among other things—it's a big, long definition—"an act or omission...that is committed in whole or in part for a political, religious, or ideological purpose, objective or cause, and...that intentionally causes death or serious bodily harm to a person by the use of violence".

The facts of the mosque shooting would seem to make it fall squarely within that definition, yet the prosecution decided not to pursue terrorism charges.

We'll fast-forward to three years ago today. As a matter of fact, we're marking the third anniversary of the attacks in London, and the person there was convicted of murders in the Afzaal family case. He was convicted of four counts of murder and one of attempted murder, for which he received a single life sentence, of course, after the Bissonnette case that we just talked about, but he was also found guilty of an act of terrorism. It made no difference to the sentence, yet the court and the prosecutor thought that it was important to also litigate that.

Of course, there was an extra hurdle to overcome for the prosecution in that they would have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this man was motivated by hatred towards an identifiable group for religious or ideological purposes.

Professor Emon, what are your comments about that? What is the importance of deciding to pursue or not to pursue terrorism charges in cases like that? What's the message to the Muslim community, or more importantly, received by the Muslim community, about an important decision like that?

Dr. Anver M. Emon: It's a complicated question.

I don't presume to speak on behalf of the Muslim community. I can only speak in my role as a law professor who has written about terror trials, and I can tell you that in writing about terror trials and looking at how they're litigated, I have concerns that the terrorism provisions of the Criminal Code are problematic.

In an article I wrote in *The Manitoba Law Journal* looking at one of the Toronto 18 trials, I could not help but note that the litigation process, the prosecutorial style of litigating the special intent requirements of terrorism or terrorist intent, have a resemblance to medieval modes of inquisition.

I'm happy to provide that article to the committee clerk upon concluding my testimony here as an example of why I'm not confident that the terrorism provisions in the Criminal Code are doing what they say they're doing and are making Canadians safer.

• (1010)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Have there been any other cases in Canada since 2001 in which section 83 of the Criminal Code has been used?

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I'm not familiar with any. Other than the one case that I have examined in depth, I haven't followed that particular issue as much as I would like to enable me to answer, but thank you for the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much for the response.

We'll now go to Mr. Shafqat Ali, member of Parliament, for five minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

My question is for Dr. Zine.

Dr. Zine, I want to expand on intersectional Islamophobia. My colleague Ali Ehsassi asked a question, and you were expanding on that.

Your article last October, "How Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism are manufactured through disinformation", examines some dark manifestations of Islamophobia. Could you expand on this and your thinking on how widespread Islamophobic sentiments lead to tragedy and bad public policy?

Dr. Jasmin Zine: Yes, I wrote an article last October about the disinformation campaigns that had been very rife historically, and especially so after October 7. Those campaigns already had the infrastructure to begin to continue to purvey a lot of disinformation about Muslims and Palestinians.

That, of course, has material consequences. I have already talked about some of the attacks in the United States in which students were shot and a six-year-old boy was killed. We already know what happened in London, Ontario, on this day three years ago.

We were hearing about sentencing, and so on, of the assailant in that attack. However, you also have to realize what motivated him. He talked about the great replacement theory, which was also discussed earlier today—the ideas of white genocide. He talked about white nationalism and "we have to get them before they get us". There's a lot there in terms of looking at some of the drivers and some of the kinds of ideologies that support acts of terror.

Whether we look at Christchurch in New Zealand, Anders Breivik in Norway or Nathaniel Veltman, there's a lot of commonality, in that they rely upon a lot of conspiracy theories that are quite prevalent about Muslims. For example, there's the idea that Muslims are going to be like a Trojan horse or a fifth column and take over the west, and there's this Islamist bogeyman.

At the core of a lot of the pursuit of Muslim charities is the idea that they are fronts for Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood. We've seen all of these kinds of discourses and ideologies and we've heard that Muslims are wolves in sheep's clothing. There's this idea of *taqiyyah*, that they will be nice but they're actually going to stab you in the back. I've documented about a dozen or more of those discourses in Canada in particular.

The consequences are very clear in terms of the violence we've all talked about and are commemorating today, and we're seeing it in tangible ways.

Also, because we're not hearing enough about what's going on right now with students and campuses, I want to point out that in London, Ontario, where the terror attack happened, a report came out at Western University in 2023 that documented campus hate incidents that included death threats; Muslim female students being accosted and told they should be raped and killed; others being warned that "all Muslims should die"; and a female student wearing a keffiyeh being pushed and physically assaulted, while another one was spat on during convocation. One student had her tires slashed on campus because she had a Palestinian flag on her mirror.

I could go on and on about the hate crimes and manifestations, but we need to look at where those ideas that inspire, justify and rationalize those acts are circulating—

• (1015)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'm sorry, Dr. Zine. I have limited time. I have a couple more questions.

I just read an article that was published in The New York Times that talks about the Israeli government's involvement in some social media platform to promote anti-Muslim or Islamophobic sentiments on social media. Have you read that article? Do you want to shed some light on that, please?

Dr. Jasmin Zine: I just read about that today, actually. In my report, I talk about a lot of other cases in which these kinds of disinformation campaigns come up.

The one you're talking about now is the one in which the Israeli government is being accused in published reports of involvement in an operation aimed at reducing support for Palestinians in Canada. It was flagged by artificial intelligence researchers. It would have been great if that question—

The Chair: Dr. Zine, simply because we're out of time and the committee will have to wrap up shortly, if you have a response, would you mind sending it to us in writing through the clerk?

Dr. Jasmin Zine: Certainly.

The Chair: Fabulous.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Garrison has given up his time frame, but we will go for the very last two and a half minutes to Mr. Fortin, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: There's not much we can do in two minutes.

Mr. Emon and Ms. Zine, my question is for both of you.

Currently, certain provisions of section 319 of the Criminal Code prohibit the promotion of hatred or anti-Semitism. In two cases, the code provides what is referred to as a religious exemption. Paragraphs 319(3)(b) and 319(3.1)(b) state that “no person shall be convicted of an offence ... if, in good faith, the person expressed or attempted to establish by an argument an opinion on a religious subject or an opinion based on a belief in a religious text”.

That means that promoting hatred and anti-Semitism is prohibited under the Criminal Code, but if it is done on the basis of a religious opinion or text, there would be a reasonable defence.

Briefly, what are your thoughts on that?

I've finished my question and I have a minute left.

Ms. Zine, can you answer in 30 seconds?

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. Does our colleague Mr. Fortin's question have anything to do with the current study?

The Chair: Okay, I understand.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: This is the first time someone has objected to my questions in committee. I'm used to it in court, but not in committee.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'm not objecting to your question. I have a point of order.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: It's very relevant.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'm making a legitimate point. We are currently conducting a study on Islamophobia, and I would like to know how your question relates to the subject of the study.

The Chair: Okay, thank you. I heard you.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Chair, I hope you stopped the clock on my time.

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, the witnesses may have an answer for you. Who is the question for?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: You're wondering who I asked?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I want to say two things. First of all, I will respond to Mr. Zuberi's objection, but I just want to make sure that you stopped the clock.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It's just a clarification.

The Chair: I would ask that we stay on topic.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Yes, that's what I want to respond to.

The Chair: You have another minute, as you know.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Chair, Mr. Zuberi is wasting my time. If you don't stop the clock—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: A point of order.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: When Mr. Zuberi raised his objection, I had a minute and a half left.

The Chair: Yes, that's true.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I raised a point of order. I did not object to your question.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I want to respond.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I want to be clear: This is not an objection.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I understand your position, Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'm sorry, Mr. Fortin, but I didn't object to your question. I raised a point of order, which is legitimate.

How does your question relate to the current study on Islamophobia?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: May I respond, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

The Chair: You still have a minute, but—

• (1020)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I had a minute and a half and I don't want to waste it answering the question.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'm not objecting to your question. I have a point of order.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Is Mr. Zuberi going to get some speaking time later? Give him a minute so that he'll stop interrupting me.

Madam Chair, may I respond?

The Chair: It's a point of order, so go ahead.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Yes, I understand.

We are talking about Islamophobia, which in layman's terms is hatred towards the Muslim community, which I and all of us condemn.

My question is about what we, as legislators, can do about this issue. I referred to a provision in the Criminal Code that prohibits the promotion of hatred against Muslims and other communities, and an exemption that allows it on the basis of a religious text.

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, I heard you correctly. Thank you.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Madam Chair?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Zuberi, please, it's my turn to speak.

The Chair: No, stop. I heard you on a point of order. I heard your answers.

Mr. Fortin, if the witness wants to answer, then go ahead.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: That's what I was trying to do, Madam Chair, until Mr. Zuberi interrupted me.

The Chair: I'll start the clock again. You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I won't repeat my question, but it was about whether Ms. Zine and Mr. Emon believe we should keep or eliminate the exemption based on a religious text, which is provided for in section 319 of the Criminal Code.

Ms. Zine first, and then Mr. Emon, could you each answer the question in 30 seconds? I think that's about as much time as I have left.

[*English*]

Dr. Jasmin Zine: Okay, I'm sorry. I'm not familiar with this particular section in the code, and having not studied it, I don't think that I can provide an appropriate example or an appropriate response to that. It's a very—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Ms. Zine, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I don't mean to be rude. It's okay if you can't answer my question.

Mr. Emon, can you answer it?

[*English*]

Dr. Anver M. Emon: I too am not a criminal law specialist, so I'm hesitant to venture a response on this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Ms. Zine and Mr. Emon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you all.

[*English*]

We will now conclude the meeting for today. We'll see you all on Monday. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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