

## Hikma Public Affairs Council

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### Submissions for the National Islamophobia Summit

#### Background

Hikma (Arabic for “wisdom”) Public Affairs Council is a federally incorporated non-profit advocacy group that was started around the time of the 2015 Federal Election with the goal of increasing the political participation of Muslims in the London area.

Hikma is also involved in political and media advocacy efforts on behalf of Muslims in London, for issues with a local, provincial, national and international outlook.

Hikma encourages Muslims to get involved in all aspects of public participation, from politics (in any party), government appointments, and in the non-profit sector by serving in volunteer leadership roles.

#### Context

We are in a war against hate. Sadly, in that war, the Muslim body count is unacceptably rising. In fact, more Muslims have been killed in Canada simply for being Muslim than in any other G7 country in the last five years. This is not something we should be a leader in.



*From: London Muslim Mosque/City of London*

As noted by Hikma Chair Nawaz Tahir at the vigil following the terror attack in London, Ontario, the war on Islamophobia requires elected officials to set aside partisan politics and provide united leadership. No other

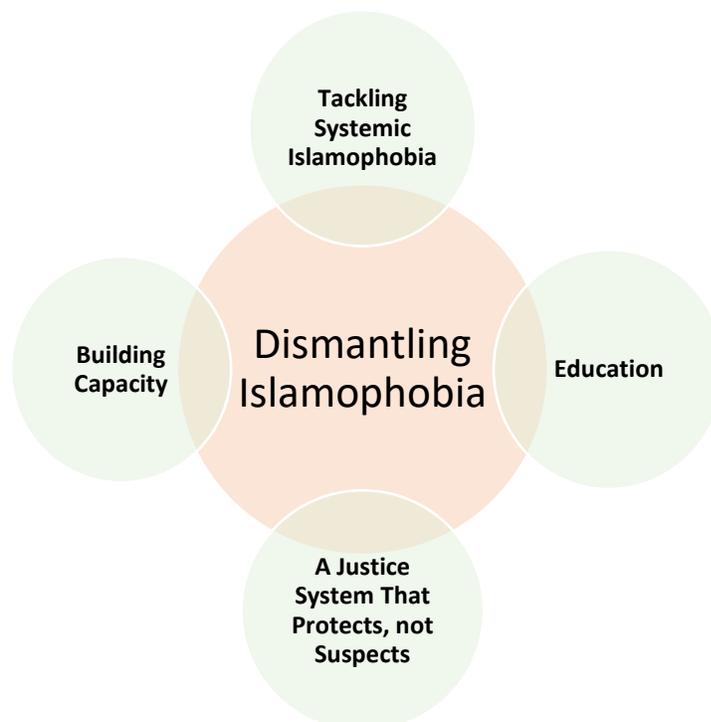
Canadian family should be stolen from us because of their faith.

Accordingly, the time for action is now. The below submissions outline the concrete steps that all levels of government should take to start the journey of ending hate against Muslims. In that regard, it must be understood that satisfaction of the below submissions is not the end of the process, but merely the start of a necessary journey to eradicate Islamophobia from our country.



Following calls for a National Summit on Islamophobia, Hikma convened a town hall in London, Ontario which was held on July 8th. In addition, Hikma solicited the input of the London community with an invitation to send ideas to us via email.

The below submissions therefore represent the culmination of a wide consultation process among London's Muslim Community. After hearing all of the comments during the town hall and receiving comments via email, Hikma has come up with the following recommendations for dismantling Islamophobia, divided across four themes:



## 1. Tackling Systemic Islamophobia and Ignorance

Whether unconscious or explicit, it is clear from numerous reports across the spectrum of government departments and agencies that bias exists in the civil service. From border security, to policing, to oversight of charities, too many anecdotal stories are emerging relating to the profiling of Muslims and/or Muslim institutions. It should not surprise anyone that when governments allow for and in fact encourage, the suspicion of Muslims, or the outright profiling of Muslims, that domestic actors take it upon themselves to act out physically and verbally against Muslims and Islamic Institutions in public.

Accordingly, eliminating bias in the Civil Service is a critical step in combatting Islamophobia. Breaking down myths about Muslims and the tenets of Islam will go a long way towards battling what has been referred to as a fear of the unknown. Eliminating this fear is a proactive way of eliminating hate, because fear of the unknown is an ingredient of hate. A cross government approach to undercutting hate by addressing ignorance is necessary. This must include broadly mandated diversity training with a specific component that involves addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims.

- **Recommendation 1.1:** All civil servants - current and any new hires, at all levels of government, be required to take diversity training that includes a specific component that involves addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims.
- **Recommendation 1.2:** Partnerships be struck with labour partners and professional associations in health care, law and teaching to ensure that employees in those sectors have appropriate training and professional development on recognizing and combatting Islamophobia and addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims.
- **Recommendation 1.3:** All municipal boards and commissions should be required to have an agenda to root out and end systemic Islamophobia that includes anti-Islamophobia training, addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims and recruiting policies that have an equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging lens.

Dismantling Islamophobia also means clear oversight of government agencies which have shown a tendency to use racial profiling to conduct their work (eg. CBSA, CRA, CSIS, and the RCMP). Numerous reports have already been published regarding serious issues in the aforementioned agencies. It is no longer acceptable to say that it is not appropriate for a government to interfere in the operational work of such agencies - if they cannot do their jobs without racial profiling, then perhaps it is time to find new people to do that work.

It is been noted in multiple reports now that the Review and Analysis Division (“RAD”) appears to be profiling Muslim charities aggressively. While Muslim charities make up less than 1% of all charities in Canada, they make up over 70% of the RAD’s revocation orders, with not a single charge being brought for terrorist financing crimes – the original justification for having the RAD.

Another well publicized issue is the aggressive nature with which the CBSA pursues Muslims – from six year old kids appearing on Canada’s no fly list to infamous “random” checks of Muslims at border crossings and airports. All of this is being done with no real oversight of CBSA officers. This has to change.

- **Recommendation 1.4:** Suspend the Review and Analysis Division (RAD) of CRA pending a review of Canada’s Risk-Based Assessment model and its National Strategy to combat extremism and radicalization;
- **Recommendation 1.5:** Establish a new oversight body specifically for the CBSA, which includes routine and comprehensive diversity, equity and inclusion reviews of the CBSA. These reviews must be conducted by the oversight body and include recommendations for improvement and timelines for implementation;

The private sector also has a role to play in fighting Islamophobia. When a Muslim woman wants to use a family change room while trying on clothes so that she does not have to come out and use a mirror in front of others, such a request should not be met with scorn or ridicule - the modesty of that woman ought to be understood and respected. When private companies emphasize the consumption of alcohol as the primary method of business development, it creates an environment where the contribution of all employees cannot be maximized. Private companies should thus be encouraged to engage in training and education on bias and specifically, Islamophobia. The federal government should facilitate this by establishing - through the Ministry of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth - a set curriculum for this purpose and by providing tax credits for private corporations - for profit and non-profit - who complete this programming for their workplaces.

- **Recommendation 1.6** - The Federal Government shall create a set curriculum for Conscious/Unconscious Bias and Islamophobia for use by private corporations.
- **Recommendation 1.7** - the Federal Government should introduce tax credits for private corporations that complete the aforementioned curriculum for Conscious/Unconscious Bias and Islamophobia in their workplaces.

Finally, singling out and ostracizing Canadians who wear religious headgear is a heinous form of state sponsored discrimination. Bill 21 in Quebec is an attack on the freedom of Muslim women (and others who wear religious headgear) that cannot be supported in a country that wants to fight Islamophobia. This is explicit in the court decision on same: “the fundamental

rights and freedoms of women who cover their faces for religious reasons will be seriously infringed.” There needs to be consequences to legislators who enact such legislation and financial penalties for provinces or municipalities that enact such legislation. If a government singles out and demeans the use of religious headgear, it should not surprise anyone that domestic terrorists are taking it upon themselves to forcibly remove this headgear from Muslim women across the country - as they are empowered by said governments to demean those who wear such headgear.

- **Recommendation 1.8** - The Federal Government and all Provincial/Territorial Governments should use all financial and other levers until the Quebec Government repeals Bill 21. In the interim, the Federal Government should lead and fully fund any and all intervenor legal challenges to Bill 21.

## 2. Education

Our Education System has a central and pivotal role in dismantling Islamophobia. What our kids are taught, how they are taught, and the training of those who teach them are important ingredients of an education system that plants the seed for a society where everyone is made to belong, without fear of hate. Early and frequent education about other faiths and backgrounds allows for an appreciation of our differences without a “fear” of the unknown (those who have different beliefs). If our education system provides early education on how people are different, yet can co-exist, it normalizes differences and reassures those cohorts that there is nothing to fear, and thus hate.

Throughout History, people of all faiths and backgrounds have contributed to the advancement of humanity and sciences but due to a narrow approach to identification of those contributions, the names of many of those contributors are either not included or have been changed and/or distorted. True and impartial information and pictures need to be displayed in relevant Institutions/Departments/Textbooks and other education resources. The exclusion of other civilizations to modern thinking deprives society of understanding and appreciating the contribution of people of all faiths and backgrounds. By failing to address this, we contribute to unconscious and explicit bias by creating a standard of superiority for certain races and relegating others to an inferior position. This approach cries out for curriculum review at all levels of education in Canada, including post-secondary education.

- **Recommendation 2.1:** The Thames Valley District School Board (and others across the country) should enact mandatory classes/courses at the elementary and secondary school levels in “World Religions” and “Social Justice”. Such courses should include an “at-home” component so that constructive discussions can occur in homes as well.

- **Recommendation 2.2:** The Thames Valley District School Board (and others across the country) should establish June 6th as an annual day for the elimination of hate, including a “walk for peace” to simulate the solidarity of walking on a sidewalk freely. In future years, the day should evolve to include education videos, other media relating to combating Islamophobia, roundtables and student assemblies.
- **Recommendation 2.3:** Nationally, January 29th - a day of Remembrance and Action against Islamophobia, should be used to provide similar programming for all Canadians relating to Islamophobia, using social media and other national events to commemorate the same.
- **Recommendation 2.4:** The Ontario Government (and other provincial governments) set up and fund a curriculum review panel, including, but not limited to credentialed Islamic Studies experts plus representatives of the Black community and Indigenous Communities to ensure a more balanced and representative elementary school and high school curriculum that acknowledges the contributions of people of all backgrounds to the advancement of humanity. The design process should include experts who have researched and dealt with hate groups and also victims of hate crimes.
- **Recommendation 2.5:** The Federal and Provincial Governments should fund Chairs at universities across Canada in the study of Islam, Muslims, Islamic History and Islamic Civilization.

Attacking Islamophobia requires attacking the ignorance underlying Islamophobia. Since 9/11, our cultural and media orientation has conditioned us to associate Muslims and Islam with terrorism. Popular shows like 24 and Homeland, to name a few, took the easy route and used Muslim characters as the bad guys, with images of Mosques and prayer services and the sound of the call to prayer used as a backdrop for dramatic effect. Mainstream books also adopted this approach, using Muslims as an easy way to establish who the bad guys are. As a result, it cannot be a surprise that Mosques are targeted with hate, that women who wear a hijab are assaulted, and that the beautiful sound of the call to prayer is a cause of suspicion.

Combatting myths and false narratives is not easy. However, these myths and false narratives contribute to people who have a negative attitude towards Muslims because they are poorly informed and unaware. By normalizing things like the imagery of Mosques and hijabs and by understanding the beauty of the call to prayer through regular advertisements and print, audio and video content, we can begin to dismantle the negative stereotypes that underpin hatred towards Muslims.

- **Recommendation 2.6:** Through Heritage Canada, a multi-year, multi-million dollar fund be set up for Muslim artists, musicians, poets, story-tellers, directors and producers to produce content that accurately represents the core tenets of Islam.
- **Recommendation 2.7:** Local governments adopt advertising campaigns similar to that used by the City of Toronto and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) in 2016:



By repeating with regularity the “normalcy” of our differences and by regularly repeating messaging of how Muslims belong, we can go a long way to reverse the conditioning that has taken a larger hold since 9/11. We need strong leadership from elected officials to consistently re-emphasize and demonstrate that it is ok to be different, but not ok to hate because of our differences. However, words are not enough. How elected officials act is also critically important because as has been made clear, the old adage is true: actions speak louder than words.

### 3. A Justice System That Protects, Not Suspects, Muslim Canadians

An ex-CSIS intelligence officer has indicated that “CSIS should have seen Alexandre Bissonette coming...He was online. He was contributing to discussions with far-right organizations.” (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/racism-discrimination-claims-canadian-security-intelligence-service-1.6083353>)

It appears that the justice system, and law enforcement in general, seem to see Muslims as a threat, instead of as Canadians deserving of protection. This needs to change.

Private individuals and groups must understand that trafficking in hate will not be tolerated in Canada. They must know that a robust security apparatus is keeping an eye on them and will shut them down and hold them accountable in the justice system.

Therefore, in light of past and current failures to fight domestic terrorism against Muslims, more oversight of the security/intelligence operations of law enforcement needs to exist, to be a check on the system to ensure that resources are being allocated to deal with the known threat of white supremacist groups and other domestic actors that traffic in hate against Muslims.

Further, the architecture of hate laws in Canada need to be updated to become relevant to the realities of social media and the threat to Muslim Canadians. Many Canadians do not appreciate that there is no “hate crime” per se - though those that traffic in online hate seem to have educated themselves about this and take advantage of this accordingly. Many Muslims decline to report hate crimes because they do not see a justice system that is serious about tackling Islamophobia, and victim support is critically deficient, or non-existent.

Politics

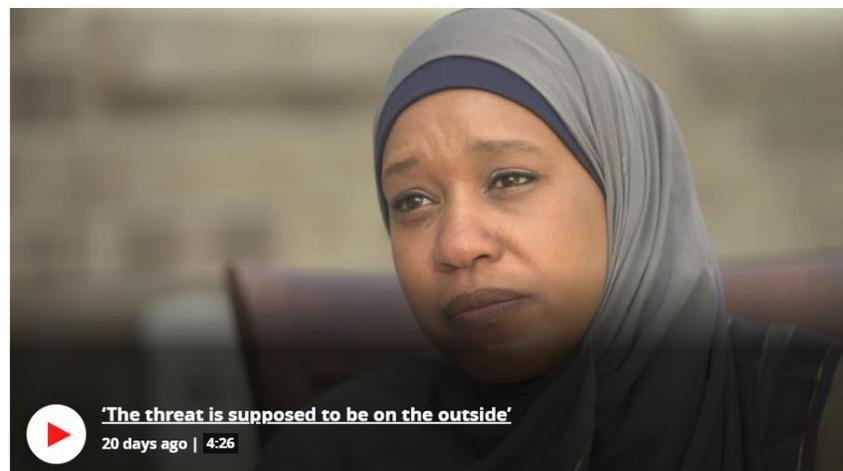
**A Muslim former intelligence officer says systemic racism at CSIS is a threat to national security**



'I myself felt like I was being targeted at CSIS,' said Huda Mukbil



Ashley Burke, Kristen Everson · CBC News · Posted: Jun 29, 2021 3:09 PM ET | Last Updated: June 29



[cbc.ca](https://www.cbc.ca)

A strong hate crime architecture is needed because we have learned that words matter. The mass murderer, Anders Breivik of Norway, cited Canadians in his manifesto to justify his campaign of murder to “save Europe from Muslim immigration.”

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canadians-noted-in-norway-attacker-s-manifesto-1.1063811>).

Breivik’s manifesto also cited the writings of the Middle East Forum (MEF), a founder of whom is Tarek Fatah, who recently wrote in the Toronto Sun that there is no Islamophobia in Canada. Similarly, the terrorist that killed six Muslims in Quebec City consulted anti-Muslim online sources before carrying out his attack.

- **Recommendation 3.1:** The amendment of the *Criminal Code of Canada* to include a specific and explicit hate crime offence where a crime is committed on the basis of the victim’s perceived or actual race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. The crime itself is based upon an act of assault, murder, arson, vandalism, or threats to commit such crimes. It may also cover conspiring or asking another person to commit such crimes, even if the crime was never carried out. It may also cover written or online material that invites or incites hatred toward the aforementioned groups.
- **Recommendation 3.2:** Elimination of the requirement that the consent of the Attorney General’s office is required to proceed with a hate crime prosecution.
- **Recommendation 3.3:** Oversight of law enforcement and intelligence gathering bodies in Canada to ensure that the proliferation of hate against Muslims is being actively pursued and that groups/individuals participating in such hate are held accountable by the justice system.
- **Recommendation 3.4:** The Federal Government should establish enhanced systems for reporting and tracking hate crimes and ensure that all law enforcement agencies across the country are sharing information.
- **Recommendation 3.5:** Training and professional development for law enforcement employees, judges, crown attorneys and other system participants on hate crimes, Islamophobia, cultural sensitivity and victim support.

## 4. Building Capacity

The war against Islamophobia needs a home base. Someone, or a department, to hold governments accountable for implementing an anti-Islamophobia agenda. This can be accomplished by the creation of an Office of the Special Envoy on Islamophobia, with input from the Muslim community on who might fill that role. The Envoy should be given specific powers in line with that of an Ombudsman, free to investigate issues relating to Islamophobia. In a show of non-partisanship across jurisdictions, this Envoy should be empowered to deal with federal, provincial and municipal issues. In order to properly fulfill this mandate, the Office must be properly staffed and funded.

- **Recommendation 4.1** - Federal and Provincial governments show united leadership to authorize the creation of an Office of the Special Envoy on Islamophobia, with proper funding and staffing provided by the Federal Government.

The full participation of Muslims in the community, political arenas and boardrooms of corporate Canada demonstrates a society that isn't just inclusive, but one that promotes a sense of belonging. All levels of government must ensure qualified members from the Muslim community are part of the process to provide awareness, training, and education to the broader public and the bureaucracies of government on how integral the Muslim community has been and is to our country. All levels of government should fund and support community programs that build the capacity of Muslims to be given the opportunity to participate in all facets of community building - be it in the non-profit world, government appointments, the civil service and the private sector. This can be done through grants to qualified organizations/persons to work with community groups, youth, law enforcement, education systems and government agencies.

- **Recommendation 4.2** - All levels of government should commit to establishing a community grants fund to allow for qualified groups that have a proven track record of building community leadership to run workshops and conferences to assist minority groups with obtaining the necessary opportunities to obtain positions on Boards of private corporations, non-profit corporations and government (through appointments and civil service positions).

Another cause of Islamophobia is a feeling or sense of superiority over those who are different. One of the root causes of this is how we treat immigrants who come from other countries with professional designations or training. We tell them that their education and/or training is

inferior to what we have here and we force them into situations of underemployment. It should therefore not surprise us when we see videos on social media of professionally educated/trained individuals working as security guards, corner store employees, taxi cab drivers and in other capacities, being told to go back to their own country as if they are inferior and do not “deserve” to be here. The idea that somehow our education system is vastly superior to those around the world is premised on this superiority complex. Accordingly, our system of welcoming newcomers who are professionally educated/trained needs to be overhauled.

- **Recommendation 4.3** - the Ministries of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion strike a task force with a mandate to explore a modernization of our policies for accreditation of professionally trained/educated newcomers to facilitate a more streamlined policy of accreditation that empowers newcomers to realize their full potential.

There is also a psychological impact of Islamophobia. First is the effect on the overall security of Muslims. Since the Quebec City Mosque shooting, it was a fear of attacks in our Mosques. Now, with the terror attack in London and subsequent copycat attacks (eg. Hamilton only a few weeks after) it is simply being in public and looking “different”. Sadly, women bear the brunt of this if they wear a hijab. Imagine being a woman, coming to Canada on the promise and hope of freedom, but then being attacked for wearing a hijab. Our youth are also feeling this - in an era of social media where attacks are relayed instantaneously, our youth are exposed to multiple touchpoints in just one day. This is on top of other issues that these agencies are dealing with including helping those who have come from traumatic situations and have suffered psychological damage.

- **Recommendation 4.4** – The federal and provincial governments provide secure, stable, long-term funding for social service agencies that focus on the mental health of Muslims and victims of hate crimes (For example, in London, the world renowned Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (<https://mrcssi.com>)). This should include funding to provide the services, plus funding to train qualified professionals to provide the culturally sensitive therapy used by these agencies.



## Conclusion

We do not want to ever be put in the position where we have to participate in another vigil anywhere in Canada again, because another Muslim was stolen from us due to Islamophobia. In order to make that happen, governments at all levels must commit to **action** and commit now. The above recommendations provide a starting framework to commence the important work of dismantling Islamophobia in Canada.

It is our hope that the upcoming National Summit on Islamophobia will accept these recommendations (summarized in Appendix A) and within a reasonable time after the Summit (ideally measured in weeks, not months), all levels of government will release their action plan to operationalize the recommendations.

Yours Truly,

*Executive Board,*

Hikma Public Affairs Council

London, Ontario

July 19, 2021

Nawaz Tahir, Lawyer, Chair  
Samer Abou-Sweid, Healthcare Executive  
Amir Hage, Lawyer  
Dr. A.R. Lawendy, Orthopedic Surgeon  
Dr. Hassan Mostafa, Dental Surgeon  
Arifa Serter, Lawyer  
Dr. Fawaz Siddiqi, Neurosurgeon

 **APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Recommendation 1.1:** All civil servants - current and any new hires, at all levels of government, be required to take diversity training that includes a specific component that involves addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims.
- **Recommendation 1.2:** Partnerships be struck with labour partners and professional associations in health care, law and teaching to ensure that employees in those sectors have appropriate training and professional development on recognizing and combatting Islamophobia and addressing unconscious and explicit bias against Muslims.
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