Manitoba Islamic Association
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The Manitoba Islamic Associations' Recommendations for the National Summit on Islamophobia
July 16, 2021

This report provides a summarized list of recommendations to the National Summit on Islamophobia, rooted in the experience of the Muslim community in Manitoba. While similar to the experiences of Canadian Muslims across the country, the Muslim community in Manitoba is also unique in several ways. Through provincial nominee and refugee sponsorship programs, the community has experienced growth through immigration, and many of its members are relatively new to Canada. Incidents of Islamophobia or racism to them are very unsettling and difficult to respond to appropriately. This growth has also meant that the community is under-resourced financially, as many of its members are still establishing themselves in Canada and require services and support that are funded by limited community donations and grant funding.

Most of the community is based in the city of Winnipeg, which is home to 10 mosques, three Muslim schools and social services organizations. There are mosques in Winkler, Brandon, and Thompson as well.

Personal Safety and Facility Security

Physical safety and security of persons and places are of prime importance, especially the security of mosques and the safety of Muslim women. The federal government has a security infrastructures program that provides 50% for security upgrades to facilities. However, given the limited resources of the community the matching requirement of this program is burdensome. Additionally, many of the mosques or the institutions running them are relatively new and have not attained their charitable status to attract substantial donations. This is further compounded by the way mosques operate.

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Mosques are generally open for worshippers throughout the day, including early morning and late evening prayers. In addition, many mosques provide community center facilities and programs serving young children, women, and families.

- All levels of government should provide funding and possibly create joint funding programs for personal safety and the security of facilities that could be at risk such as mosques.
- Funding should be at the 100% level.
- Funding should be available for security upgrades to facilities, training to staff and volunteers and programs to provide self defense workshops and programs to persons deemed vulnerable or at risk (youth, women).

Education

In our community consultation on Islamophobia, many community members stated that education is key to combating Islamophobia and other forms of hate. Families report that their children do experience Islamophobia in schools, from inappropriate humour to outright hostility and violence. We recommend the following:

- All levels of government should integrate anti-Islamophobia policies and practices, such as development of curricular resources.
- K-12 education should incorporate Muslim history in Canada in addition to Muslim civilization and contributions, in partnership with and with input from the Muslim community.
- School libraries and public libraries should invite the Muslim community to recommend resources to make available to students/public. For example, the Winnipeg Public Library system worked with the Manitoba Islamic Association to offer readers several books on Islam, Muslim culture, and Islamic civilization.

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- Governments should fund the development of educators' kits on Islamophobia in partnership with local Muslim communities and educational experts.
- Governments should offer scholarships for high school and university students who show leadership in building bridges, countering Islamophobia and other forms of hate or who wish to study this phenomenon academically.
- Ensure Muslim and minority groups are well represented in provincial educational systems. This includes governance boards, educators, and educational leaders.
- At the post-secondary level, support and fund the establishment of Muslim chaplaincy at universities. For example, the University of Manitoba has one counselor who supports hundreds of Muslim students, but the arrangement is not permanent, and its future is uncertain. With funding and support, these programs can become permanent.
- Canadian Muslim personalities, achievement and occasions should be celebrated in pre- and post-secondary educational institutions.
- Federal and provincial governments and their respective agencies that fund post-graduate academic research should provide more funding for research projects aimed at documenting Canadian Muslim experiences and those of other minority groups and the academic study of Islamophobia and other forms of hate.
- Municipalities should establish anti-islamophobia task force to address and confront issues of Islamophobia and their impact on Muslim communities.

Community Support

Community plays an important role in providing emotional security and mental health support. For example, over the span of 3 years, a part-time mental health counseling service offered by the Manitoba Islamic Association has provided counseling for close to 600 clients, with over 100 on a waiting list. The experiences of the pandemic and Islamophobia has quadrupled the demand for this service. Other agencies report similar strain on their services.

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Further, local Muslim communities play a pivotal role and are often very active in educating the public and building bridges between communities. These efforts should be supported and amplified.

- Provincial government should provide funding for culturally and religiously sensitive mental health support and counseling.
- Provincial governments should enhance and expand existing mental health services and provide training for mental health professionals assisting Muslim clients.
- Provincial and municipal governments should support and fund outreach and educational programs spearheaded by their local Muslim communities, which enable Muslims to share their stories and experiences and to continue to build bridges with the community at large. Barriers to funding outreach and secular programs run by faith-based organizations should be removed.

Policies

- The federal government should end CRA audits that disproportionately target Muslim charities.
- The federal government should end law enforcement and information gathering practices and laws that disproportionately target Muslims and other minority groups, such as security certificates.
- The federal government should take a principled stand against policies and laws that target Muslims, religious groups, and racialized minorities such as bill 21 in Quebec.
- Law enforcement agencies (municipal police, provincial police and RCMP) should make it easy and safe to report hate crimes.

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- Law enforcement should prioritize monitoring and dismantling right-wing ultra-nationalist groups.
- Provincial governments should establish anti-racism directorates with clear and explicit mandates to fight Islamophobia and other forms of hate. Their mandate should include anti-Islamophobia training for public sector employees, including teachers, law enforcement, judges, correctional facilities staff, healthcare, etc.
- Provincial governments should ensure that Canadian Muslims are represented on government agencies, boards and commissions in a variety of areas, such as education, healthcare, utility boards, etc. These bodies should reflect the societies they serve. There should be a clear strategy to target and recruit qualified Canadian Muslims for these bodies.
- Municipal governments should similarly recruit and appoint Canadian Muslims to service on municipal committees and boards (police, libraries, neighbourhood committees, etc.).
- Municipal governments should clearly reject any attempts to derail the establishment of mosques or other community institutions that are motivated by misinformation or hatred.

Conclusions

This submission provides recommendations based on the experiences of the Muslim communities in Manitoba. This experience in many ways parallels those of other Canadian Muslim communities.

While Muslims in Manitoba have enjoyed good relations with their neighbours for many years, Manitoba is not unfortunately free of Islamophobia. Incidents of harassments and discrimination are all too common. The community was particularly on edge when reservist Patrick Mathews was unaccounted for in 2019.

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To say that lives are at stake is an understatement Muslim families, women and children are living in f fear of what is next or whether they are going to be the next victims. All levels of government and civic society must take steps to ensure that the safety of the Muslim population is guaranteed. We must all come together to fight and address the root causes of all forms of hatred which afflict our society.