

## **Why January 29th should be declared a National Day of Remembrance & Action on Islamophobia?**

One year later, Canadians are still reeling from the terrorist attack in Quebec that claimed six lives, caused eight life altering injuries, and left a prayer room thick with white smoke. The January 29, 2017 attack is the culmination of years of islamophobic rhetoric, and now Muslims across the nation are proposing the tragedy be remembered by declaring the date a national Anti Islamophobia Day of Remembrance. Research identifies two major sources of Islamophobia, hate-politics and sensationalized media, and hope that the declaration will serve to reduce the harmful effects of both causes.

The necessity lies in the ever increasing rise of hate crimes in Canada. According to Statistics Canada's November 2018 release, overall hate crimes increased by 47% in 2017; yet hate crimes against Muslims rose by 151%, with regions such as Ontario and Quebec 207% and 185% respectively in Ontario and Quebec alone. These numbers translate to 51% of Muslims reporting that they've personally experienced discrimination.

In a 2018 Canadian Community Engagement Study, two thirds of participating Canadians expressed a desire for the government to invest in the elimination of systematic racism and discrimination, acknowledging a negative sentiment towards Muslims in Canada exists. Yet the government, in a valiant effort to increase the safety of the nation, has inadvertently contributed to Islamophobia. The Harper administration introduced many controversial bills that repeatedly used fear and division to fester anti-Muslim sentiments in the country. The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) vice-chairman Khalid Elgazzar said, "The Canadian Muslim community bore the brunt of sinister political rhetoric surrounding the federal election which painted Muslims as terrorists or terrorist sympathizers as well as being anti-women." The NCCM scrutinized the current government for its 2018 Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada, citing several problematic elements: Under a graphic titled "Key Plots or Attacks Conducted in Canada", the report only references attacks involving Muslims and does not mention any of the right-wing extremist attacks in Canada from recent years. Further it included cases deemed entrapment by the B.C. Superior Court. And despite several cases of online threats by anti-Muslim white supremacist extremists, the report concludes that right-wing extremist groups do not tend to promote violence. "By doing so, the government is harmfully suggesting to the Canadian public that only Muslims and other racialized communities are the real terrorist threat," says NCCM Communications Coordinator Leila Nasr.

This bias is seen consistently in the media as well; University of Alabama researches found that radical extremism purported by alleged Muslims receives 357% more press coverage than that done by other radicals. Another Georgia State university study found alleged Muslims carried out just 12.4% of attacks in the US but received 41.4% of news coverage. Associate Professor Deepa Kumar writes that "Islamophobia is about politics rather than religion per se". Experts Egorova and Tudor cite European researchers in suggesting that expressions used in the media such as "Islamic terrorism", "Islamic bombs" and "violent Islam" have resulted in a negative perception of Islam.

The proponents for marking January 29th a National Anti Islamophobia Day of Remembrance want the action to serve as as a yearly reminder combating Islamophobia. Chairperson for the national think tank, Think for Actions, Dr. Mukarram Zaidi says, "Islam. like other religions does not teach terrorism. The Quran itself says, Whoever kills an innocent life it is as if he has killed all of humanity [5:32]. Canadian Muslims are peace loving citizens who love this nation. Our leaders consistently condemn terrorist attacks. And now it's time we condemn anti-Muslim rhetoric."