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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are studying systemic racism and religious discrimination, as a result of M-103, which had been forwarded to us. This committee, however, decided that the way to focus on this would be to look at the broader issue of systemic racism and religious discrimination. All the parties agreed to do this, and so we set our themes based on that.

I want to welcome our witnesses who are here today. We have Sherif Emil, director of pediatric general and thoracic surgery at the Montreal Children's Hospital; and then from the Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada, we have Laurence Worthen, executive director.

I will begin with Dr. Emil.

Dr. Sherif Emil (Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Pediatric Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, McGill University, Director, Pediatric General and Thoracic Surgery, Montreal Children's Hospital, As an Individual): Madam Chairwoman, honourable members of Parliament, committee staff, guests of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the privilege of allowing me to address you today.

My name is Sherif Emil. I am not a public figure, a political operative, or a political advocate. I am not here to represent any organization or movement. I am here as a genuinely concerned citizen, one of Canada's newest, having obtained the privilege of citizenship on Canada's 150th birthday, last July 1. On that rainy day in Montreal, I took an oath to faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen. I see my presence here today as a way to express gratitude for my new citizenship and fulfill my duties as a new citizen.

I am a pediatric surgeon at the Montreal Children's Hospital. I attend to one of the most vulnerable patient populations, babies and children with surgical illnesses. My patients and their parents come from every corner of the world and represent every culture and faith. My trainees are similarly diverse. Approximately one-third hail from Arab states of the Persian Gulf—deeply conservative Muslim societies. A large part of my success as a physician and educator stems from my deep respect for diversity and my genuine tolerance for views significantly different from my own.

I am here today to offer my views on M-103 and any potential bills that may eventually emanate from this motion. M-103 calls on government to, among other things, develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia". The last word in this sentence, "Islamophobia", has rendered this motion controversial. Unfortunately, an alternative introduced by the opposition, urging Parliament to "condemn all forms of systemic racism, religious intolerance, and discrimination of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and other religious communities" was rejected by the majority, even though Muslims came first on this list.

Allow me to examine the notion of Islamophobia. I will start with a direct quote: "What we saw in the last couple of days in Germany and Netherlands are the reflections of Islamophobia." These were the words of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday, March 12. They were uttered in a series of speeches in which Mr. Erdogan also called the German and Dutch governments Nazis and fascists. Apparently, these governments were Islamophobic because they refused to allow Turkish officials to hold campaign rallies among Turkish immigrants. The rallies were meant to support an April referendum in Turkey aimed at transitioning the country from its recent past as the only Muslim secular democracy—albeit one that continued to deny the Armenian genocide—to its future as another Islamic autocratic state. We all know what has happened in Turkey since the referendum passed.

I ask you: do you agree with Mr. Erdogan's definition of Islamophobia? Do you agree with what Al-Azhar, Islam's most respected seat of learning, has done when they accused Islam Behery, a liberal Egyptian thinker, author, and journalist, of propagating Islamophobia and insulting Islam? Mr. Behery, a practising Muslim, used a weekly television show to examine the roots of Islamic fundamentalism that have given rise to the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State, al Qaeda, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, and others. These movements draw their constitutions from accepted and endorsed sources of Islamic doctrine and jurisprudence. His message was simple: why blame Islamic State for crucifixions, beheadings, enslavement of women, and destruction of idolatrous historical landmarks when all of these practices are enshrined in Islamic texts?

In fact, many of the practices of Islamic State—public beheadings, murder of homosexuals, stoning for adultery—are also the practices of the Government of Saudi Arabia. The only difference is that the Saudi government codifies them into law and brands anyone who dares to criticize them, as the Swedish foreign minister recently did, as exercising Islamophobia. Mr. Behery's "Islamophobic" program earned him a year in prison.

He is not the only one. Fatima Naood, a respected Muslim thinker and feminist, was sentenced to prison for daring to question one of the practices of the Islamic feast of al-Adha. Ibrahim Eissa, an Egyptian Muslim journalist who highlighted the rampant and chronic persecution and discrimination against Egypt's Christian minority, had his TV show closed and was questioned by a federal prosecutor. Again, Al-Azhar, front and centre in the war against so-called Islamophobia, charged them both with the same thing.

The notion of Islamophobia is behind the apostasy and blasphemy laws that pervade Muslim countries, laws that are used regularly to imprison and subjugate minorities and some Muslims. Last year, four Egyptian Christian high school students, youth, were sent to prison for insulting Islam and propagating Islamophobia. Their crime was a video they made mocking Islamic State.

● (1535)

How do you plan to define Islamophobia? What do you plan to do with those accused of propagating it? Will some of my testimony today one day become illegal in Canada? As I understand, Islamophobia has been defined quite loosely—any speech, opinion, or action that promotes irrational hatred towards Muslims.

When she tabled her motion, the honourable Iqra Khalid cited her experience as a young Canadian woman:

When I moved to Canada in the 1990s, a young girl trying to make this nation my home, some kids in school would yell as they pushed me, "Go home, you Muslim", but I was home. I am among thousands of Muslims who have been victimized because of hate and fear.

I sympathize with Ms. Khalid. Living in Saudi Arabia as a young Christian, I was called an infidel daily by other children and adults, and made to feel inherently inferior. I was not allowed to worship or declare my faith, let alone exercise it. My family that remains in Egypt, our native country, is constantly reminded that they are second-class citizens. More than 100 Egyptian Christians, including many children, have been killed during the past year in incident after incident. Their crime is being Christian. In last December's bombing of the Coptic Orthodox cathedral, my wife lost two second cousins, beautiful young women, the only children of their parents. Christianity, ladies and gentlemen, not Islam, is the most persecuted faith in the world today.

I understand the pain of ignorance, hatred, prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance, but I don't call it "Christianophobia", because it's not. It's ignorance, hatred, prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance. In fact, I experience denigration of my Christian faith on a regular basis by Quebecers who use the holiest of Christian religious terms as swear words. A few years ago my hospital put up a "multicultural" poster stating that Easter is a pagan feast.

Ignorance and insensitivity are not phobias. "Phobia" is a medical term, implying a pathological and irrational fear. As far as I know, the only religion it has been applied to is Islam. The proper

definition of Islamophobia, therefore, is not "irrational hatred of Muslims" but "irrational fear of Islam".

Hatred is always wrong. Incitement to discrimination or violence against any group, including Muslim Canadians, is illegal and always should be. Muslim Canadians bring a welcome diversity to our society. I work with dozens of them every day. Their contributions make our society better, but concern about Islam as it is practised in much of the world today is not irrational.

On the same day that Ms. Khalid tabled her motion, an e-petition was tabled that called on the House of Commons to join the signatories "in recognizing that extremist individuals do not represent the religion of Islam, and in condemning all forms of Islamophobia."

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Dr. Sherif Emil: Ladies and gentlemen, we are living in an age when terrorist armies occupy large swaths of entire nations, commit heinous crimes daily, advertise their raw depravity proudly, cite a unifying explanation for their actions in Islamic texts and history, and inspire followers in every country, including Canada, but let us ignore these hundreds of thousands of individuals. They, after all, are the extreme, who do not represent Islam.

How does the mainstream look? In mainstream Islamic society, apostasy is a crime often punishable by death; minorities, which often represent the indigenous populations of these societies, are robbed of equal citizenship; and dissent is equated with treason. A Pew Research poll taken in Egypt, a moderate Islamic society, showed that 62% of Egyptians said that law should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran. One-third sympathized with Islamic fundamentalists, and only one-third believed that Christians should exercise their rights.

I will end with an incident that I hope is still fresh in your minds. Four days ago, a young Coptic Christian priest was stabbed and bludgeoned to death in the middle of the day in a busy street in Cairo as the crowd watched. Egyptian Christians are resigned to the likelihood that his attacker, although apprehended, will not face justice, because none of his predecessors have. In a mainstream Islamic society, no Muslim will face due punishment for killing a Christian.

● (1540)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Dr. Sherif Emil: Ladies and gentlemen, I started my day today at 5 a.m. in order to round early on my patients, start my clinic early, finish it early, and hurry to the train that brought me here to Ottawa. Many of my friends and colleagues counselled me not to come. Some feared for my life, reminding me that it only takes one violent extremist unhappy with my public comments to silence me for good. Others were afraid that I would be branded an Islamophobe and see my practice and academic reputation suffer. Many said, “Don't confuse them with the facts. The majority party already knows what it wants.”

The Chair: Dr. Emil, I'm going to have to cut you off. Can you round it up very quickly with your final sentence?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I chose to come today because my duty as a new Canadian citizen is not to surrender to fear or cynicism. I chose to come because I am now part of the Canadian experience, one of the most successful in the history of humanity, and I want to teach my two daughters, who were born in this country, to cherish that experience and to do their part to see it continue to be tolerant, open, and free, to see it advocate for equity and justice, not only here in Canada, but around the world.

Thank you again for the privilege of the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Emil.

Now we have Mr. Worthen from the Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada for 10 minutes.

Mr. Laurence Worthen (Executive Director, Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

On behalf of the Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to address a very serious concern—that of prejudice, violence, and discrimination against people because of their religion.

CMDS Canada is a fellowship of over 1,600 doctors and dentists whose goal is to integrate Christian faith with professional practice. Christian faith is an intrinsic part of who we are as human beings. We cannot just turn on or off our faith in God. Faith is so much a part of who we are that it must, by its very nature, spill over into all aspects of our lives.

Because of this commitment, we are very empathetic to the concerns of all religious groups when we hear about prejudice, discrimination, or lack of tolerance in Canadian society. We believe that Canada is a pluralistic society within which every Canadian is able to live out their faith, their beliefs, or their creed and to participate in as many aspects of civil society as their values permit. It is intolerable that certain groups, because of their religious beliefs, should be excluded from any opportunity available to the average Canadian or be subjected to hate crimes, violence, prejudice, or discrimination.

I worked for several years with the Government of Nova Scotia, developing training materials for government employees in relation to the respectful workplace policy. We developed policies that extended the rights guaranteed under the Human Rights Act for groups with protected characteristics related to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and so on. We also extended that to include personal harassment or bullying. I was proud that we were working

towards a workplace where no one would be bullied or harassed for any reason. I think there is a general Canadian consensus that this is an admirable goal.

Given this effort, imagine the following scenario. Imagine there was a group within Canadian society that had one of the protected characteristics found under either the provincial Human Rights Act or the charter. Imagine that members of this group were unable to practise their profession in certain provinces or be educated in certain professional schools because they had a particular protected characteristic. In discussions in class, there was no acknowledgement of the legitimacy or viability of their world view. They were told not to seek positions in rural areas because of their protected characteristic. They were advised that they could only work in certain small sections of their profession because of their protected characteristic. In policies put forward by their regulatory bodies, people who shared their moral convictions on a topic were deemed unprofessional, selfish, and not worthy of the noble position that their profession provided. Regulatory leaders openly spoke of decades-old anecdotes that were the product of theoretical discussions that never took place. When regulatory leaders began to use their power to act upon their prejudice, the inevitable result was discrimination.

This scenario is not fictional. It is real. It affects doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals in Canada who cannot, because of their religious beliefs, be involved in the intentional killing of patients at any stage of life. Their conscience and religious convictions tell them that killing patients is morally wrong, and they cannot participate in it. We cannot participate in procedures that go against our moral responsibility to God and our fellow human beings, yet some provincial regulatory authorities, like those in Ontario, require physicians to arrange for patients to be seen by doctors who will end their lives or in some cases to actually end the life of the patient themselves through providing a lethal prescription.

As a result, students report being told in class that if they have these beliefs, they should avoid certain geographic practice areas. Physicians have been told by regulators to retrain for a small subset of specialties, such as plastic surgery, pathology, or sports medicine. Applicants for medical schools—as part of the admissions process—are faced with questions that put them at a clear disadvantage because of these ethical issues. Prominent medical school ethicists have gone on record as recommending that students who have conscientious objections should be screened out before they ever get accepted into medical school.

•(1545)

Imagine that this scenario was occurring to systemically exclude any group of people who had one of the protected characteristics. Imagine that people were being penalized because of their colour or sexual orientation, or gender, or racial group. The powerful forces in our society—government, media, universities—would not tolerate this. Why is it tolerated when this discrimination is against people of faith? Why is this serious attack on our constitutional values accepted?

I would suggest the reason is that Canada is at an important crossroads. We need to decide what it means to have a secular state. Everyone feels that state neutrality is a good thing, that the state must never be in a position where it favours one religion or creed at the expense of another one. This allows a pluralistic society to flourish.

However, something more insidious is happening here. People are being discriminated against. They are being forced to do things that go against their religious convictions, convictions that will not allow them to participate in certain procedures that involve bringing about the death of their patients. The requirement to do this, even against conscience, is enforcing and promoting secularism or atheism, which is in itself an identifiable creed. State neutrality is breached, therefore, when a secular state decides to impose secularism on people who have established religious beliefs that should be protected under human rights legislation and the charter.

These concerns involve a broader spectrum than just Christians. Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus who are physicians, nurses, or other health care professionals are also threatened, as are many who are secular humanists and atheists who do not feel that killing patients is in the patient's best interests. An argument based on multiculturalism actually supports greater care or support of conscience and religious rights, as many of the new immigrants coming to Canada bring with them religious beliefs that can enrich our cultural mosaic.

At the Senate justice committee hearings on the bill that would legalize euthanasia in Canada, three major religious groups stood shoulder to shoulder in advocating for conscience rights for health care professionals. This unity of purpose was evident because many religious groups in Canada sense they are in a battle for human rights against a radical secularism that would remove all reference to God, and even the transcendent, from every aspect of public Canadian life.

Secularists who espouse this view do not recognize that they are imposing their values on others. Because they have such a fervent belief that they are right, they feel justified in using the tools of the state to force others to either be coerced into joining them or potentially lose their livelihood. This is the essence of bullying.

Such a stripping of the fundamental core of the human person will only lead to an impoverishment of the Canadian mosaic—

•(1550)

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: —and ultimately a move towards totalitarianism. In the 20th century, those governments that would have striven to enforce secularism have been among the worst offenders against human rights.

The solution to this problem starts with the leadership in our country. Having any of the protected characteristics, such as religious belief, should not restrict access to power in this country. It should not affect a properly qualified member's right to sit in the House of Commons for a political party, or in fact be the chair of a commons committee. It is not a political football to be used to garner votes. It is something that every MP and every government should hold sacred and should not tamper with for political expediency.

Three physicians' organizations and five doctors have taken the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to court, asking the court to stop this active and virulent discrimination on the basis of religious belief and violation of conscience.

This was not a proper remedy.

First, it was expensive. It has cost us nearly \$350,000 to date to vindicate our rights under the charter. Second, the resources of the college and the Government of Ontario, which acted as intervenors, were difficult for not-for-profit organizations to challenge. Finally, the damage has already been done. Many hundreds of Ontario physicians now know that their regulator and their government do not respect their deeply held religious beliefs and that members of the staff of the college feel that these doctors should not be able to practise medicine.

Even if we get a decision in our favour, how will we ever be able to overcome the prejudicial attitudes that have already poisoned the Ontario health care system?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: We have turned something beautiful, which is belief in God and a profound respect for the dignity of the human person in health care, into the subject of a regulator's disciplinary investigation.

The Chair: Mr. Worthen, you have 10 seconds left. I'm going to ask you to wrap up, please.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: Thank you.

Religious intolerance is a real problem in Canadian society and has many manifestations and forms. We urge the committee to make a strong statement that will improve Canada's standing as a truly pluralistic society in which people of all religious beliefs feel safe to practise their religion according to their god and their conscience.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to the second part of this exercise, which is questions. In the first round, the members of Parliament will ask a question, and the question and the answer must not go over seven minutes. You have seven minutes to do both, so I'm asking everybody to be as crisp as they can.

We're going to start with Julie Dzerowicz, for the Liberals.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I want to start off by warmly thanking both of our speakers today. Your presentations were both very compelling. In particular, I thank you for coming all this way. I know it took a lot of time. I also want to say congratulations on becoming Canadians. You're warmly welcomed. We're very pleased to have you as part of our Canadian family.

Mr. Emil, I know you've just recently become a Canadian, but had you been in Canada for a while before that?

I'm just going to ask a few short questions, and then I'll get to my bigger questions.

Dr. Sherif Emil: Yes. I've lived a total of 16 years in Canada—four years as a student, two and a half years as a trainee, and now nine years as a practitioner.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Do you believe that systemic racism and/or religious discrimination existed in Canada during the 16 years that you've been here?

Dr. Sherif Emil: If systemic racism and religious discrimination existed, I probably wouldn't be a pediatric surgeon today, because my name, Sherif, is a Middle Eastern name. It can be Muslim; it can be Christian. Nobody ever asked me in my training, in my selection, who I was or what I believed in, so no, I do not believe systemic racism and discrimination exist.

I believe discrimination and racism exist. They exist in many circumstances, in many situations, and that's totally unfortunate, but I don't think they are systemic.

I have lived in societies where systemic racism and discrimination exist. Trust me that I know what it's like, and this is not it.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Then you don't believe that we need...?

Part of the key mandate of this committee is to look into a whole-of-government approach that will address systemic discrimination and racism in Canada. That's what we're looking for here in terms of recommendations.

Now, if you don't believe it's happening, it's hard for me to ask you for recommendations. I don't mind turning my attention to Mr. Worthen, unless you believe that there are some recommendations that you can make around a whole-of-government approach to address religious and racial discrimination in Canada.

• (1555)

Dr. Sherif Emil: Let me just make this comment. All the laws I mentioned in my talk are under the guise of protecting a population from insults or discrimination or whatever you want to call it. No, I don't believe it's the government's job to tell us....Discrimination and racism are an ugly part of human nature. Nothing the government can do can absolutely get rid of it.

What it could do is punish people who are responsible for hurting others in any way, shape, or form, and I believe those laws already exist. If we start passing laws saying that things are going to be illegal, that what you say is going to be illegal because we have now defined it as systemic discrimination, we are heading in a very bad direction.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I thank you very much, Mr. Emil.

Mr. Worthen, I want to turn my attention to you, because we're very much seized. We're midway through our testimony and we're hearing from a lot of wonderful witnesses such as you. Again, we're looking for a whole-of-government approach on how Canada can address systemic racism and discrimination across this country.

You've talked quite a bit about what I understand to be discrimination against Christians in this country. I would be grateful if you had some recommendations for us on how we could reduce systemic discrimination, whether for Christians or any other religion in this country. If you could give us some specifics, I'd be grateful.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: As I mentioned, I had the privilege of working with the Nova Scotia government around creating the respectful workplace, so I've done some work around issues of racism and discrimination. I think we have a paradigm within government for dealing with discrimination against other protected characteristics, such as sexual orientation, colour, and gender. We have a paradigm and a system. We simply need to turn people's minds towards religious freedom and use the same model, the same paradigm, that we've used in those cases.

That's the frustrating thing for me. Having been in the system and knowing what you do to deal with racism, what you try to do to deal with discrimination, now I'm seeing it imposed in Canada against people of faith. I find that part disturbing. We need to add people of faith to the list. Even though they're there legally, they're not top of mind.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. I appreciate that.

I'll mention some of the things that have come up in terms of ideas, and I'd love to get your comments as to whether or not you think these would be good ideas.

One is a national action plan. Another is an educational component that goes right across the country. It could be at all the different levels of education, creating a counter-narrative to what exists right now. It could include different stories around how we should be talking about different religions, different cultures, diversity, and the strength of this country.

What do you think about any of those ideas?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I think those are all really good ideas, but I think it has to start at the top. I don't want my presentation—

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: —to be perceived as being political, because it's not meant that way. I've seen evidence of this in all the parties.

I think Parliament has to come to the point where you recognize that people who are MPs shouldn't have to leave their religion at the door when they sit in Parliament. I'm sorry to say it, but it has to start at the top. You have to start right from the Prime Minister down to create a culture that says it's okay to be a devout Christian, it's okay to be a devout Muslim, it's okay to disagree with abortion, it's okay to disagree with euthanasia; you can still be a member of our party. You should not be excluded from—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just because I have only 50 seconds left, that point was made very clearly, and I thank you for reiterating it.

I have one other question. What role do you think that community groups can have in a national plan against systemic racism and discrimination? What role do you think that governments can include community groups in?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: That's a great question.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Laurence Worthen: For 12 years I worked in the not-for-profit sector. I think government can play a role in getting these various agencies and community groups together and helping them to dialogue and network, and together I think they can have a tremendous positive influence on the culture.

The Chair: Very well done, Mr. Worthen. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

I'm going to move to David Anderson for the Conservatives.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Mr. Worthen, I want to follow up on that a bit. A couple of other witnesses said that the key is getting communities together, and that it's not the government initiating all this in some massive plan and it's not the amount of money spent on it. What would be your thoughts on that aspect? Is it important that we get people together, or is it important that we spend a pile of taxpayers' money on this effort?

•(1600)

Mr. Laurence Worthen: Well, we're trying to influence a culture, and that's never easy. It's not a simple program; it's changing people's hearts. Again, at the risk of nagging you as MPs, I think it has to start at the top.

Mr. David Anderson: Do we need legislation to protect conscience rights in legislatures across this country?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I believe so, yes. Manitoba's already put legislation forward, but I think it has to be... With the way our politicians conduct themselves across Canada, do they respect religion? That's my question. If I say that my relationship with God will be dramatically impacted if I'm forced to do something against my will and a politician says to me that I have to do it anyway, we have a serious problem in this country. I've had numerous politicians, members of these parties, tell me that.

You have to start right there. You have to start in the House of Commons. Are you going to respect people's relationship with their god in the way that you cast your vote in Parliament? It has to start there.

However, I also believe that government has a role in calling people together for a national conversation. I completely agree with that, and as I mentioned before, working with not-for-profit organizations for 12 years, I know they can be a tremendous force for social change.

Mr. David Anderson: You represent an association of Christian medical and dental personnel. Is this discrimination that you find

only against Christians? Is it more an issue of faith, or is it more an issue of being a Christian?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: No, I think the discrimination is across the board—Orthodox Jews, for instance. It's ironic, because 50 years ago Jews weren't allowed in certain professions in Canada. Now we run the risk of driving them out of certain aspects of medical care. Muslim doctors have expressed extreme concern to us when we've met with them about this. Sikhs, Buddhists, other religious physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals are very concerned about the crisis to conscience in Canada.

Mr. David Anderson: Do you have specific recommendations? If you don't have them today, can you send them? Do you have specific recommendations or suggestions that this committee or the government might look at implementing to deal with these issues?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: Yes. Perhaps it might be best if I could draft something and send it to you. Would that be helpful?

Mr. David Anderson: That would be fine. We accept written submissions. We've talked to others about recommendations. We have received a number of them, but I would like to hear your specific recommendations about how to deal with conscience rights that protect people of faith across the board.

The Chair: Please send it to the clerk.

Mr. David Anderson: Dr. Emil, I think the definition of Islamophobia that you referred to is that we should be talking about an irrational fear of Islam, but you had talked earlier about codified Saudi law and Pakistani law and how opposition in any form is basically seen as Islamophobia.

Can we have a definition that is different from what we have in other places in this world and expect that this word would then be used with any value to it? We have about eight or nine definitions of Islamophobia now at this committee. Can you talk to that a bit?

Across the table particularly, we seem to have the sense that there's a definition of Islamophobia that's very different from what's used in other places around the world. Can we do that, or do we all have to agree on the word to be able to use it properly?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Sir, I'm going to be very straightforward. That word needs to be removed from the vocabulary. It does not apply to any other religion. Why are we using it for Islam?

We can look at the Catholic church and its sexual abuse scandal. Even though less than one-tenth of one per cent of the priests committed abuse, imagine if we had said that this had nothing to do with the Catholic church and it was just a small group. However, what did we do? We looked at the culture of the church and we held the church accountable. We looked at how the process worked out and we held the Catholic church accountable for its abuses.

We didn't do that with Islam. We look at these deviant groups and say that they are the exception, that Islam is tolerant. Where is it tolerant? I would like to know, because I've lived in one Muslim country after another and I've travelled, but I have yet to find an Islamic society that actually respects its minorities, allows freedom of faith, allows change of faith, or gives equal rights, not to people who immigrate to its land but to those who are the indigenous populations of the land.

• (1605)

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Dr. Sherif Emil: The extreme comes from the mainstream. That word "Islamophobia" is used every time we criticize the mainstream, the basic tenets of how Islam is practised in what you call moderate nations. That word needs to be removed from our vocabulary. Let's talk about hate of Muslims. It exists. Let's talk about discrimination against Muslims. It exists, just as it exists with many other faiths. Let's talk about that, but let's remove the word "Islamophobia" and do away with all definitions.

Mr. David Anderson: Can you give me some direction on how you think this committee could address this issue of hatred against Muslims and hatred against other faiths? What are some effective recommendations that we can make that would deal with that issue in this country?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I think the honourable member suggested several excellent ways. I believe that this is not a way to legislate. I have lived in societies where the government has tried to legislate against certain thinking, whether ugly or positive. It does not work. You cannot legislate against racism. You can legislate against what racism does, but you cannot legislate against racist thought. That's an ugly thought that you have to address through church groups, through community groups, and through advocacy groups. That's how you target that.

The government's passing a law is not going to get rid of racism.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you.

I think I have less than half a minute.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. David Anderson: I'll pass it on.

The Chair: You will pass. Thank you.

We then go to Jenny Kwan for the New Democrats.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to both of our witnesses for their presentation.

I guess there has been much discussion about the definition of Islamophobia and the usage of it, or whether to use it. I just want to say that in from one of our previous meetings there was a simple definition that was being offered for consideration as a working definition. I quote: "Islamophobia is simply anti-Muslim discrimination or hate."

We all know that anti-Semitism means something like anti-Jewish discrimination or hate. We also know that homophobia means something like anti-gay or anti-LGBTQ discrimination or hate. Using logic, it's not that hard to extend that thinking to Islamophobia. It's on this premise that I use that word in this

context, because I find that definition quite simple and one that we can use as a working definition.

I want to pause here and ask Dr. Emil whether or not that is an acceptable working definition for the purposes of what we're trying to accomplish here.

Dr. Sherif Emil: No. It's an incorrect definition. Phobia is fear. I mean, we have to be responsible for how we use words. Phobia is fear.

If you were afraid of walking down the stairs, I would call that phobia. I wouldn't call it hate of the stairs. Therefore, no, ma'am, that is not a correct definition, and unfortunately, it's not just the definition, but how the definition is used.

I've given you real examples of people who have been put in prison because of how the definition was used. How am I going to guarantee that what I told you today, if we use the definition that you just mentioned, isn't going to be considered Islamophobia and that I would have just done something illegal under Canadian law a year or two years or five years from now? How do I guarantee that? How do I guarantee that somebody is not going to interpret, from what I said, based on that simple definition, that I had just engaged in anti-Islamic thought?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's because part of what we have in Canadian society is criminal law associated with hate crimes. That is the definition Canada utilizes to determine if there's a violation of a particular law, in that instance, so it has to be put in that context. I would argue, then, that what would be prosecuted would be based on the legal definition of a hate crime.

Dr. Sherif Emil: Are Muslims not currently protected on hate crimes?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All people should be protected against—

Dr. Sherif Emil: Why do we need a specific category for Islamophobia if they're already protected on hate crimes, just like every other faith?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The motion was highlighting the issue of Islamophobia simply because there was a rise of hate crimes against people of that faith. That, I believe, was the reason it was included, although the motion itself does not exclude, and in fact it goes out of its way to include, all forms of discrimination.

I guess we can debate the definition for a long time, but I'm running out of time, so I want to get into this other aspect on systemic discrimination. Thank you, Dr. Emil; I'm glad to hear that you haven't experienced systemic discrimination. It's really good to hear that.

While others have experienced systemic discrimination, and while you say there can't be laws to deal with that, what about education? Would education be an important aspect that governments should involve themselves in to ensure that people learn about the differences in religion and race, and the similarities as well?

• (1610)

Dr. Sherif Emil: Yes, 100%, but the devil is in the details.

In Quebec we have a multiculturalism law whereby every school has to teach that every religion is acceptable and that what we learn at home is no more special than what we're told in school. That's how it is in Quebec. Loyola fought that. The high school fought that, because it wanted to teach the Christian faith. It is a high school's right. It is the right of parents to teach their children their faith. Yes, I agree, education is a superb way to do it, but it depends on how you do it.

When the state starts telling children what they should learn and that they are to ignore what their parents teach them, no, the state has gone too far.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm talking about education in terms of... We know that hate is a learned behaviour. We also know that discrimination is a learned behaviour. That's certainly from my own personal experience. What we need to be very mindful of is to teach all people, children and adults, to be culturally aware, and to face awareness as well, around the differences among all of us. Sometimes that too is misrepresented, even by adults in the education system.

Would you say it is important, then, for government as a whole to come forward with an approach to ensure there is appropriate training and education even for adults themselves, so that they can pass that information along regarding cultural sensitivity?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I have no disagreement with that idea and I would support it, but this issue is not just about Canada. This issue is about what Canada believes on the world stage and what it advocates for around the world. Canada is very silent when it comes to what's happening in Islamic societies. It does not advocate for the rights of minorities. It does not advocate for equal citizenship. It does not advocate or advance its values. It often apologizes for those values, and that's incorrect.

The Chair: You have one minute, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Dr. Sherif Emil: May I give an example, so I'm not speaking in generalities?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, but I have less than one minute now.

I wanted to give Mr. Worthen a chance to kick in here for a minute and focus on the recommendations.

Would you support the government taking an approach to education and training with respect to cultural sensitivity and interfaith differences so that we can ensure that we don't go down the path of teaching hate and discrimination advertently or inadvertently?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: Yes, I would, but there's one proviso. You can't do it in a way that promotes secularism or do it from a secular perspective. That would be the only proviso I would have, because what's going on here, as I tried to explain in my comments, is that secularism is seen as an objective space, but in fact it isn't. It is its own religion, so if there's going to be sensitivity, there has to be sensitivity across the board.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Mr. Worthen, but the seven minutes are up.

We'll move on to Mr. Breton for the Liberals for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will share my time with Mr. Arif Virani.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here and taking part in our important study.

I will continue in the same vein as Ms. Kwan and will talk about education.

In recent weeks, speakers have told us that, in some ways, the lack of education leads to a lot of disinformation in workplaces, at school, and elsewhere, contributing to a climate of hate and fear.

We have talked a lot about the potential role of the government. Some agree about that role while others do not.

What role could community or religious leaders play to counter disinformation throughout our community?

Dr. Emil, you may answer first.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Dr. Sherif Emil: I think dialogue is where everything starts and where everything ends. We need to speak to each other. We need dialogue.

Again, the context of the dialogue is extremely important. I can tell you in absolute honesty why my community is not very engaged in dialogue with other groups that come from the same nation, Muslim groups. It's because there's a very strong sense of denial of what's happening in their own community. Many of the Egyptian expatriate Muslim groups do not admit that there's discrimination in Egypt. They do not admit that Christians are rejected.

If you look at the proportions of the Egyptian expatriate population in Canada, it's about 70% Christian and 30% Muslim, whereas the population in Egypt is almost the opposite, with 90% Muslim. Why do Christians leave the Middle East? Is it because they don't like the land of their birth? When you are engaged in dialogue with groups that do not admit to causing the pain that you've suffered in your life, it's very difficult to continue that dialogue.

Dialogue is important, but it has to be frank and honest. We have to be able to speak to each other honestly about our pain. Of course, most Muslims have not participated in events or killed anybody. We all know that. Most of them are excellent citizens who want to have an excellent life in Canada. However, it's still important to be engaged and to be honest about the societies we come from. When you meet with other religious groups for dialogue, it is important to be able to actually listen to them, not to immediately jump into a defensive stance. Unfortunately, that's what often happens when interreligious dialogue starts.

Al-Azhar, which I've quoted several times, has been very much engaged in that. They're happy to engage in dialogue with the Pope and with others, as long as Islamophobia is on the top of the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you for your testimony, Dr. Emil.

Mr. Worthen, would you like to add anything regarding disinformation?

[*English*]

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I apologize for not being able to respond to you in your first language.

I go back to the same thing. I think there's a tremendous need for improved and increased dialogue and for what I would call a deep pluralism, a pluralism that does not shy away from our differences but articulates them, develops them, and understands them.

I think that's what we need, and I think Canada could be a world leader in this endeavour. However, again I caution, because the promotion of secularism that I see going on within our government is a real concern. It's going to be very hard to get Christians and other religious groups to the table with government, to trust government, if government on the other side is actually taking action to discriminate against people because of their religious beliefs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you, Mr. Worthen.

Mr. Chair, I will give Mr. Virani the rest of my speaking time.

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you.

I have two comments and then three questions, primarily for you, Dr. Emil.

I take issue with your categorization of what this motion is about. The motion deals specifically with Canada, and I think it's important to ground this in Canada and direct what we're trying to do in terms of the racism and the religious discrimination we're trying to deal with here in Canada. I think that's very important.

Second, on the issue about terminology, we've had extensive discussions about terminology, including the use of the word Islamophobia, but I also put it to you—

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Arif Virani: —that terms evolve. For example, the term “homophobia” would be very poorly translated as a fear of homosexuals. It's clearly understood to be the discrimination against homosexuals, the LGBTQ2 community in total.

Third, you said that basically you don't believe systemic racism exists in this country. I would just put it to you that we heard extensive testimony from witnesses, including from indigenous witnesses and black Canadians, about their perceptions of being categorically juxtaposed to that. It's important not to present submissions here that are based purely on personal experience or anecdote; it is important to look at the lay of the land writ large. People would point to the residential school system and the overrepresentation of indigenous persons and blacks in the criminal justice system as examples of systemic discrimination.

You stated that the government is “powerless” because you feel that there are already laws that exist, particularly laws that deal with hate speech and hate promotion. What we've heard from witnesses and what we will continue to hear from witnesses is how to perfect legislation—for example, how to encourage reporting of hate crimes

or how to encourage prosecutions of hatred. We will have witnesses coming to speak to that.

What you did say later on, or came around to in response to other questions, is that there could be room for church groups, community groups, and advocacy groups to have some of this dialogue that we were just talking about.

I want to put it to you, because I don't think we share your despondence: is there space for the government to show leadership on this issue and get those church groups, community groups, and advocacy groups talking to one another, through funding mechanisms or by showing other leadership?

Lastly, sir, you've taken issue with the term “Islamophobia” in this motion—

• (1620)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Chair, on a point of order, you're very good at calling out witnesses when they're taking too long. When Mr. Virani eats up all the time available to this witness, you're not calling that out, giving him the opportunity to make it impossible for the witness to respond to his questions, including some allegations of inappropriate testimony.

Could you now tell the witness and Mr. Virani how much time is left?

The Chair: Mr. Virani had his one-minute notice. He has 45 seconds left.

I am looking at this and I will deal with it. Mr. Virani can ask what questions he wishes in whatever manner he wishes. It is not up to the chair to tell people what to ask and not to ask, but just to keep them on time.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you for clearing that up.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What are your views on motions that enumerate specifically targeted communities? We've had many such motions in Canada, not just this one about Islamophobia. We had a motion with respect to anti-Semitism in 2016, one with respect to the Yazidi community in 2016, and one with respect to your community, the Coptic Christians. We've identified communities when they're basically being subjected to hatred.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Virani, your time is up. Thank you.

As chair, I am supposed to make sure that the meetings run on time and that people aren't waiting for the second hour unduly. We do not have the ability to have a five-minute round for our second round, so I will ask that our second round be a three-minute round. It might mean that we go about three minutes over time, but that will give our second group the opportunity to have their due time.

We will begin with Mr. Reid for three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Chair, you deliberately ignored my insistence that we not go to three-minute rounds in the second round. I find your behaviour in this matter very frustrating indeed.

By the way, is it Dr. Sherif or Dr. Emil?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I am Sherif Emil. You can just say Sherif, or Dr. Emil, or whatever you like. Emil is my last name.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

You didn't get a chance to answer any of those questions. I want to ask the obvious one. You said you had experienced no systemic discrimination. I take it that you were simply not giving a comment on the situation of aboriginal Canadians vis-à-vis the justice system, for example, or black Canadians; you were referring specifically to yourself as a person of Middle Eastern ancestry who is sometimes incorrectly mistaken for a Muslim.

Is that correct?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I do not believe systemic religious discrimination exists in Canada. That's all I was referring to.

I do not believe there's systemic religious discrimination. As I've said, I've lived under that. I've lived in Canada many years, and most of my adult life in the U.S., and no, I don't believe there is systemic religious discrimination whereby people are denied opportunities based solely on their religion.

I want to make another point about Islamophobia and your point that this is about Canada. No, it's not about Canada, because "Islamophobia" is a word used around the world. It's used specifically in Islamic societies to persecute others, so when we decide to join in this witch hunt of what we call "Islamophobia" and how we're going to punish people who engage in it, we've just joined a very unfortunate club of nations.

Sir, Islamophobia is not just about Canada; it's a worldwide phenomenon. I wish Canada would stay out of it.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have a very limited amount of time to ask you for your response to the next question. There of course was a terrible incident of mass murder in Quebec City this January, and it was obviously the worst sort of hate-based action imaginable against Muslims, who were killed just because they were Muslims.

Therefore, I want to ask this question. Would it seem reasonable to you if this committee were to report back that the government ought to condemn the following: all forms of violence, systemic racism, intolerance, and discrimination against Muslims? Would that seem like a reasonable thing to do?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Absolutely. These are despicable acts and they should be condemned in the strongest manner and they should be punished, not just condemned.

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to ask this question, then, to see if we can square the circle—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll come back in the next round of questions to allow you to answer it. It's simply this: if we used that definition to say that for the purposes of Canadian government action and the Parliament of Canada, that is what Islamophobia will mean, and nothing else, would that resolve the problem of a definition of Islamophobia for you?

Dr. Sherif Emil: No, because Islamophobia is a slippery slope. It often starts focused and then has its own life, as has happened in one nation after another where people have been persecuted and imprisoned first under a narrow definition, and then the definition

widens. That word should be left out of the vocabulary. It is not used with any other religion, and I don't think it needs to be used with Islam.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Emil. I think your time is up. You may come back to this question, as Mr. Reid said.

Next is Anju Dhillon for the Liberals, for three minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): My questions will be for Mr. Worthen.

How would you describe the situation regarding systemic racism and religious discrimination here in Canada?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I come from Nova Scotia, which unfortunately has a very long history of racism. I am disturbed to no end when I see things that have happened on a regular basis. I think it's terrible. I think we still have a problem with racism and I am concerned about any experience of violence against people because of their religious beliefs or discrimination against people because of their religious beliefs.

The purpose of my presentation today was to ask this committee to look at the concerns of health care professionals who are being discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, in that there are certain procedures that they cannot do, yet they are being required by their regulators to do these procedures. I believe it's very serious in that we've had doctors who've had to move from one province to another, doctors who've had to retire. It's a serious problem, and it is because whenever a government or a society decides it is going to impose a secularist mindset, it right away takes away the diversity of a society, and in my view the pluralism and the beauty as well.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: What do you think the federal government should do to combat such racism that is systemic or religious?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I believe that there should always be a consideration of people's responsibilities before God, however they see God, and that there should be pan-Canadian legislation that would protect conscience rights so that people could not be forced or coerced to do things against their will.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: What kind of legislation exactly would you want to see?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: I would want to see legislation that would protect health care workers from being forced to do things against their conscience.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay, perfect. That's it for me. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

We're now going to go to Mr. Reid again, for the Conservatives. You have three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dr. Emil, I'm going to express the concern I have regarding our moving forward in this committee with a recommendation to condemn Islamophobia without defining Islamophobia, and it's this. In France, a very civilized country, we recently saw a distinguished French historian, Georges Bensoussan, of North African Jewish ancestry, up on hate crime charges for quoting another French writer or filmmaker who is also of North African descent, who said that "in Arab families in France and beyond, everybody knows but will not say that anti-Semitism is transmitted with mother's milk."

This perhaps is unfair, but I'm not sure it qualifies as hate speech. He was charged with criminal hate speech, eventually acquitted, and that acquittal is now being appealed by the umbrella organization to fight Islamophobia in France. The fear I have is that this is the danger of not trying to define it, and that's why I asked about the definition earlier that focuses purely on violence, discrimination, and racism against Muslims.

If we put in wording like this and specifically say that we don't mean other kinds of definitions of Islamophobia, that we reject all forms of Islamophobia, that we just mean the one I described, just the violence and discrimination, couldn't that serve as a useful legal definition for Canada?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Yes, I would find that acceptable. If the word has to be used, that's a reasonable way to define it.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, I appreciate that very much.

How much time do I have left? Do I have one minute?

The Chair: You have one minute and 40 seconds.

• (1630)

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

You didn't get the opportunity to respond to Ms. Kwan. You wanted to give an illustration to show how Canada does not represent the national values it claims to uphold. Could you use the remainder of the time to give that example?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Thank you for coming back to that. I'll give a simple example. I watched the Prime Minister's victory speech, and he said the following:

There are a thousand stories I could share with you about this remarkable campaign, but I want you to think about one in particular. Last week, I met a young mom in St. Catharines, Ontario. She practises the Muslim faith and was wearing a hijab. She made her way through the crowd and handed me her infant daughter, and as she leaned forward, she said something that I will never forget. She said she's voting for us because she wants to make sure that her little girl has the right to make her own choices in life and that our government will protect those rights.

I salute the Prime Minister for standing up for women who want to wear the hijab. In Canada or in any western democracy, any woman should be able to wear the hijab if she so chooses, but what about the hundreds of thousands of girls and young women who have no choice and are forced to wear the hijab and the niqab? Shouldn't the Prime Minister also be standing on the world scene and advocating for them? He calls himself a feminist. Where is his position on that?

There are women who have had their faces burned in country after country for not wearing the niqab. There are girls, right here in Canada, aged 6, who are being forced to wear the hijab. Where is the Prime Minister on that position? Where is the Liberal Party? Can the

Liberal Party start being liberal with a small / because those women need support—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Emil. Your time is up.

I would like to go to Mr. Vandal for the Liberals. You have three minutes, please.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to put a little context to all of this. I want to read from the actual motion. I believe it was you, Mr. Emil, who said that this was not about Canada, and that this was about the world. The terms of reference we are working with today

are: That the government should recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear...and that we should develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination...in Canada.

We are all elected by Canadians across the country, every one of us, and although I fully appreciate that it's a complex, cruel world, we are focusing on what we can do for our country as leaders in this Parliament.

I believe I may have misunderstood you. Did you say that Canada does not advocate for the rights of minorities in this country?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Yes, sir. I said they do not actively stand for rights of minorities. That's right.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I'm stunned by that comment. Could you unpack that a little more?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Sure, absolutely. I just read you how Egyptian society works. I haven't heard criticism of Canada for how mainstream Egyptian society—

Mr. Dan Vandal: Of Egyptian society?

Dr. Sherif Emil: And every Muslim society—Pakistan, and Indonesia, which just filed a blasphemy motion against a single Christian governor who managed to be elected in Indonesia.

Where has the Canadian government's position been on all of those?

Mr. Dan Vandal: With all due respect, Mr. Emil, I'm sure you've heard of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Dr. Sherif Emil: Yes, I have.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Every Canadian has fundamental freedoms, whether they be freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of belief and expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to worship any god they want, regardless of ethnic background or whether you're an indigenous person. Every Canadian who lives here has the same rights.

Dr. Sherif Emil: You're addressing a different question completely. I have asked where Canada's position is. You've told me that you don't advocate for minority rights around the world, and I said give me an example—

Mr. Dan Vandal: First of all, I have never said those words you just quoted.

The Chair: Order, please.

I will put in extra time, but you have 30 seconds left, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Emil, if you want to say something, please make sure that you allow Mr. Vandal to continue to interact with you.

Dr. Sherif Emil: I apologize.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, I'm stunned that a witness can come here and say Canada does not advocate for the rights of minorities. That's something I fundamentally disagree with. It's something that I frankly find insulting, and I think every elected official at this table disagrees with it.

I'm going to end my presentation there.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have three seconds left, and I'm going to call time. Ms. Kwan is next, for three minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to build on the area that I was canvassing, which I hope will be solution-oriented and build on recommendations that I think the committee needs to consider.

We talked about the issue of education and training, and I think we have established that it is an important area we need to embark on.

We also in Canada had a Canadian program, a national action plan to address racism. We had it in place, and it has now sort of lapsed. In a previous discussion with other witnesses, I asked a question to see if we should be reinstating such a national action plan on the question around racism and then relate it to this motion before us on the issue around religious discrimination as well. I'd like to canvass the witnesses around that specific recommendation.

•(1635)

Mr. Laurence Worthen: My response is that I think it's a very important thing. I think that religious tolerance in this country is being challenged. The group that we represent is very concerned about it, to the point of doctors being worried that they're not going to be able to care for patients. Religious discrimination in general is something that we need to address in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Dr. Emil, would you comment?

Dr. Sherif Emil: I don't really have much to add. I agree with what has been said.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do I have a few more minutes left?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Building further on that, then, when you devise a national action plan, we need to have government resources put into it; otherwise, the plan in and of itself would not build itself to support NGOs' work with provincial and territorial governments, etc., to devise this plan and to implement this plan.

Would you also support the call for the federal government to provide financial resources to implement such a plan?

Mr. Laurence Worthen: Of course, it's easy for me to recommend the spending of federal government money, but the only caution I would raise is to let the religious leaders dialogue and

let the religious leaders advise you on that, because in my view there's a danger of government coming in and imposing some kind of value or secular religion on others.

I think that people will provide you with the expertise you need. I'm a deacon in the Catholic church myself. People will provide you with the expertise that you need, but there needs to be an appropriate respect for where people are coming from and their particular perspectives.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Worthen. I think the time is up.

I want to thank the witnesses very much.

Mr. Worthen, I look forward to your sending to the clerk your recommendations, as requested earlier by one of the members.

If I could, please, I would also like to discuss this issue of freedom of conscience. I helped write the Canadian Medical Association ethics guidelines, and it says that any physician cannot be forced to work outside the freedom of his or her conscience.

I would like to know how this is happening and where this is happening, because that is contrary to the charter. It guarantees freedom of conscience. It would be interesting if you could give us some examples, because this is something we haven't heard of. It might be interesting to know what exists.

Thank you very much. I would like to suspend for a couple of minutes while we bring in the new—

Mr. Scott Reid: I have one tiny thing, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think out of courtesy we ought to also extend to all witnesses who are coming here, including Dr. Emil, the opportunity to submit recommendations. It didn't occur to me until later that we haven't done it for everybody, and we should, as a group, I think, consistently say to all our witnesses that they should submit any recommendations they have to assist us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

I think it's inherent in whatever witnesses get when they're asked to come that we're hoping that they would submit recommendations when they are here.

Thank you.

•(1635)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1645)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee is undertaking a study of systemic racism and religious discrimination.

We have three witnesses today. The witnesses will each be given 10 minutes. They are Farzana Hassan, author and columnist; Andrew P.W. Bennett, senior fellow of Cardus; and from the Voice of the Vedas Cultural Sabha, Mr. Doobay.

I will begin with Farzana Hassan for 10 minutes, please. I'll give you a two-minute note so that you can wrap up; I'll have to cut you off if you don't.

Ms. Hassan.

Ms. Farzana Hassan (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair and the honourable committee.

I am grateful to be given the opportunity to discuss some of my concerns about M-103, the anti-Islamophobia motion introduced by Liberal MP Iqra Khalid.

First of all, I would like to inform the committee that I am a Muslim woman and continue to identify as one. I have children, grandchildren, and other relatives living in Canada who also identify as Muslims, and some visibly so. The events of the past two decades have cast aspersions on the Muslim community as a whole and have engendered a degree of anti-Muslim sentiment. We have also witnessed the murder of six Muslim men in a Quebec mosque. It was all very tragic.

It would be a legitimate goal if one were to investigate the causes of hatred and resentment toward Muslims. Many Canadians from both Liberal and Conservative backgrounds would have no objections to investigating the causes, but while I consider anti-Muslim sentiment to be palpable in some situations, I object both to the spirit and wording of M-103.

I originally come from a country where blasphemy is considered a crime against the state. The term “Islamophobia” poses a unique problem in the way it is understood in Islamic nations as well as among the majority of Muslims, some of whom espouse a deeply obscurantist understanding of Islam. This understanding does not allow for any criticism of Islamic precept and practice. It can include criticism of Islam, Islamic culture, practices, and Muslims.

In my view, no ideology is to be regarded as sacrosanct in this manner. In the western world, we are allowed to challenge Christianity, the prevalent religion, and other belief systems, faith traditions, cultures, and practices.

It was my hope that challenges to some of the practices upheld by the Islamic orthodoxy would have come from a greater number of moderate Muslims themselves. They would have been perceived by the general public as wanting to distance themselves from practices like polygamy, jihad, and violence. It was my hope that they would protest acts of terror against non-Muslims as forcefully as they do when Muslims are killed as a result of what is perceived as non-Muslim aggression. They would work hard to embrace Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance.

The committee has a mandate to investigate reasons for growing anti-Muslim sentiment. My own personal reading of the situation is that the causes for such resentment are as plain as day: Muslims are increasingly under suspicion because the Muslim narrative is in the hands of fundamentalists who demand excessive faith accommodations, such as demanding Friday prayer services during school hours that are known to cause disruptions in schools, as well as making demands for something akin to anti-blasphemy laws.

The Muslim narrative is in the hands of those espousing political Islam. It is only because of this group—and not the majority of Muslims, who simply wish to live their lives in peace and harmony—that Muslims as a whole tend to be seen in a negative light. The majority of Muslims who are moderate have not been visible enough to distance themselves from such demands.

Presently, Muslims are disliked primarily, in my opinion, because of this demand for M-103. The hatred many say they are experiencing is, in fact, the direct result of this particular demand. I consider it more of a backlash than entrenched bigotry. These reasons for anti-Muslim sentiment are, in my view, quite obvious.

However, here I am concerned mainly about the word “Islamophobia”.

In this regard, I fail to understand why the House would not agree on a more precise term to combat anti-Muslim sentiment. The term “Islamophobia” is often falsely equated with the term “anti-Semitism”. MP Khalid has also alluded to an equivalence between the two, yet the two are vastly different.

What is the House's reason for adopting a term that has clearly Islamist overtones, is uncomfortably vague, and in fact dilutes the purpose for which it is overtly intended?

A common dictionary meaning of anti-Semitism is “hostility to or prejudice against Jews”.

Islamophobia, on the other hand, also includes criticism of Islam as a religion. The common dictionary meaning is “intense dislike or fear of Islam, esp. as a political force; hostility or prejudice towards Muslims”.

● (1650)

Honourable committee members, I have no objections to investigating causes of anti-Muslim bigotry, but I have grave fears about including the word “Islamophobia” in the motion. Allow me to surmise the reasons behind the insistence on the word by what I consider to be some obscurantist forces.

I believe it is part of the Islamist agenda in Canada to include criticism of Islam and Islamic practice in the west rather than simply attributing the causes of anti-Muslim sentiment in the west to anti-Muslim bigotry. Use of the term “Islamophobia” sets a dangerous trend, given the connotations the word has in Islamic countries and in some Muslim circles in the west.

We often hear from M-103 supporters that the motion is not binding and does not affect anyone's entitlement to repudiate anything they object to, including certain orthodox Islamic and fundamentalist practices, yet the vagueness of the word “Islamophobia” tends to make it all-inclusive. It compromises a person's freedom to criticize and challenge, because without a clear definition to apply to M-103, a person would not want to test its limits. In short, the way M-103 is worded is more of a political tool, the way I see it.

I am Muslim, but I'm also a proud Canadian and I do not wish for Canada's cherished values, such as freedom of speech, to be compromised in this fashion, even if it is in the slightest way. In my opinion, M-103 does that, even though there are claims to the contrary, claims that it is not binding. Dare I say that I consider the demand for an endorsement for such a motion an unpatriotic act, as it casts an unfounded and harsh judgment on Canada's laws and society? It is unfortunate that MP Khalid experienced racism at school, but it is also this very country that has given her the opportunity to be a member of Parliament, along with other Muslims.

No system or ideology ought to be beyond reproach and questioning. It is only through questioning that we are able to address the wrongs of the past and move forward toward achieving a better world. The ideology of political Islam should also not be made inviolable, but if the term "Islamophobia" is not eliminated from the motion, it will potentially include jeopardizing any criticism of orthodox Islamic practice, despite MP Khalid's assurances.

In the context of M-103, the term remains ill-defined, and my recommendation is for the House to eliminate it. I also feel that no one has the right to tell me what I should say or think about Islam. I think history has always been on the side of people who do speak out—not the cowards.

Thank you very much.

•(1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to Mr. Bennett, senior fellow of Cardus, for 10 minutes.

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett (Senior Fellow, Cardus): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to appear to offer my thoughts on the issue before the committee: systemic racism and religious discrimination.

My views are informed by my work as senior fellow at Cardus, Canada's faith-based think tank, where I focus on issues around religious freedom and public faith. They are also informed by the extensive work I did with different faith communities, both domestically and abroad, as Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom from 2013 to 2016. Finally, they are a reflection of my Catholic faith.

Let me offer six preliminary thoughts on this topic as points of departure for my comments on the need for promoting genuine and deep pluralism in Canada that is respectful of difference.

First, the fact that Canada is a diverse country is self-evident. It is diverse ethnically, socio-economically, religiously, ideologically, and so on, and that is a very good thing.

Second, as a community of human beings in this country, struggling to live a common life, we often get it wrong, and we erect barriers between ourselves that limit genuine engagement and dialogue with one another.

Third, there is racism and religious discrimination in Canada. There has always been, and there will always be this type of racism and religious discrimination in Canada. In our country today, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others face discrimination variously

because of who they are, what they believe, what they wear, and what they value, all of which can be at odds with what secular elites in this country believe to be true.

On the question of Islamophobia, this is a very vague term. I would say it is not the best term to have in the motion, unless it is very clearly bounded and defined.

Let's be clear on what needs to be addressed, as many of your other witnesses have said. We need to address anti-Muslim hatred that exists in this country. This is a hatred that is bred from three specific evils—ignorance, indifference, and fear—all of which must be addressed at the level of our own communities. These selfsame evils manifest themselves in hatred of Jews, hatred of Catholics, hatred of LGBTQ persons, hatred of people who oppose same-sex marriage, hatred of first nations people, hatred of pro-lifers, and the list goes on. We need to combat hatred and discrimination in all these cases. We need to combat hatred and discrimination in our communities and discover anew the dignity we each bear by learning to talk to one another again and learning to respect and champion differences that exist. Government can help to better facilitate this by encouraging greater public expressions of religious faith and different beliefs so that we can hear one another and talk to one another again.

With regard to the subject at hand, the Government of Canada's role is to uphold the Constitution and to guarantee the freedoms we bear as citizens. These freedoms are not the gift of government. They are borne by us as citizens by virtue of our humanity. In upholding freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, and freedom of association, the government and the courts should have a very broad understanding of these freedoms and allow them to be largely free of restrictions, except where such limits can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

This is a society that must be founded upon respect for difference, even when beliefs are so different that they are seen to run counter to the prevailing narrative of the day, whatever that might be. The government should be careful to not be too prescriptive of freedoms. As well, I would say that Parliament should be careful to not be too prescriptive of freedoms either within government institutions or in the broader society, thereby imposing undue limits on freedoms.

Finally, to respect and to champion difference is to promote a deep and genuine pluralism in which disagreement—even deep disagreement—is allowed. In our disagreements with one another we must always exhibit great charity, recognizing the inherent dignity we all bear as human beings.

Let me now speak further about this deep and genuine pluralism.

A common civic life without debate and encounter between us is no civic life at all. Too often in our country these days, we either shy away from engaging our fellow citizens or we engage them in a confrontational way, often via the perceived anonymity of what I would say is the profoundly disconnected world of social media. This is emblematic of an increasingly uncommon life, and it is not sustainable.

●(1700)

As Aristotle asserted in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the pursuit of the common good is founded upon human flourishing. This understanding of what is at the core of our social, economic, and political lives has been affirmed by many since Aristotle, including by St. Thomas Aquinas from my own Catholic tradition. I would assert that the common good of human flourishing must be the very heart of our understanding of what pluralism is.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the advancement of human flourishing and the associated commitment to pluralism must be deeply rooted in the championing of human dignity above all else in our common life. I say “above all else” because this dignity comes from God.

In championing human dignity, we must not only recognize but respect that we believe different things and that we hold different views on what is most important in human life. Often these different views and beliefs are profoundly different and can cause us to feel ill at ease, or they might at times even raise our ire. So long as all that we say and do is said and done charitably, in a manner that is respectful of the other and their inherent human dignity, then we can agree to disagree. Even in that disagreement, we can encounter one another.

As a Catholic Christian, my understanding of the dignity of the human person is grounded in my belief that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. I believe that this reality was made present among us when God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, he who is fully human and fully divine, without commixture or confusion in his two natures and his two wills, one in the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons. He is the saviour and redeemer of the world.

Now, many of you here reject this view and affirm a belief that is radically different from my own. Likewise, I would reject what many of you believe, yet here we are, side by side, living in this place we call Canada, our country. Our common life together is enriched by our difference, as well as by our shared goals for this country and, please God, for each other.

In conclusion, to advance a deep and genuine pluralism, we must effect a cultural shift in this country at all levels, from Parliament on down and from local communities on up, to enable all citizens to live their religious faith and beliefs publicly, including in professions, in our universities and our schools, in our cultural institutions, and in our legislatures and public services.

I would urge honourable members of this committee to assert this in Parliament and in your deliberations on this motion. We must further our public faith. That public faith can be based on difference, the freedom to say, “I don't believe that Muhammad is the prophet”, the freedom for a Muslim to say, “I don't believe that Jesus is the son of God”. These are differences that we need to allow to exist within our society in a spirit of charity and a spirit of openness. That's what a free and democratic society is based upon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

I must congratulate this panel. You've all gone well under eight minutes. That's fabulous.

Mr. Doobay is next. You have 10 minutes, please.

Dr. Budhendranauth Doobay (Chairman, Voice of Vedas Cultural Sabha): I can take the four minutes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Budhendranauth Doobay: Thank you, Madam Chairman and members of the committee, for allowing me to express my views as a Hindu.

Racial discrimination and religious intolerance are inherent among all human beings. We all have discrimination. If we feel that by coming here and pretending that we are going to solve it... We all have it. What I'm trying to say is that we must try to see how best we can work together to understand one another, see the good values of each other, and see that there is only one order. I am not calling it God; it's an order. There's an order in the universe that causes the sun to rise up in the east and go down in the west. You can call it various names. If we see that order, understand that order, we will be living happily. If we keep saying my religion is better than your religion... All wars have been fought over religion.

In regard to our context here today, as I said, the world is not a perfect place. As an ideal, the pursuit of perfection should not be discouraged, but for practical reasons and in the context of human behaviour, such pursuits must remain in the realms of idealism. Therefore, a major plank of my presentation is that you must not forget that Canada has already advanced very far in the acknowledgement of ethnic and religious diversity and the pursuit of systemic and individual tolerance of such diversities.

Failure to overtly acknowledge the progress made in this context and to push too hard or too quickly for further accommodation risks a boomerang and the deleterious effects of push-back. Already one can see the signs of the latter among our neighbours to the south and our friends across Europe. There will always be fringe elements that will insensitively ignore the iconic Canadian progress in ethnic and religious tolerance, and while failing to be appreciative of their good fortune of being in Canada, will unduly exaggerate imagined or small incidents of intolerance as if they were back in the countries from which they have fled. This is very important.

Attitudinal and behavioural changes cannot be rushed. They stand better chances of success if they are pursued sensitively through education, discussion, and persuasion as opposed to frontal or aggressive systemic or legislative means.

If you go to where our temple is, you see that we try to involve the community. We have the Wall of Peace. If you look at the picture on the screen, besides the horrors on the top part, on the bottom you'll see Mandela. I won't say much about Aung San Suu Kyi today. We have Jesus Christ and the Om symbol from Buddhism. Down at the bottom we have Islam, Judaism, and so forth.

What I'm trying to say is that here is a place where we say that all religions are good. If you're a Muslim, be a good Muslim. If you're a Christian, be a good Christian. Live your life the way you are dictated. To do this, we should involve the community. I am a member, and the Government of Canada representative, on the Global Centre for Pluralism, of which His Highness the Aga Khan is the chairman. This is one of the tenets we are working together on. Most of you know this because of the beautiful museum that has been built here, and the one in Toronto, where he embraces this exact thing.

In terms of my personal experience when I came to Canada, I was offered a job at the University of Toronto as a vascular surgeon. I went to the professor and chair of the department. He asked me, "Did you do your residency here?" I said, "No, I was trained in England. I studied in Jamaica." This was 30 or 40 years ago; I'm not aging myself.

• (1705)

"He said, "Do you know what? This job is reserved for our boys." I took it. They told me to write against it; I said no. Then I went to McMaster. I became a professor of cardiovascular surgery there, and I had no discrimination whatsoever.

If you can do your work well, if you are not afraid of anyone, and you can project your image properly... I'm not saying there is no discrimination. I don't want to be too racial here, but if a policeman stops a nice blonde girl and she smiles at him, most likely he will not give a ticket. All of us notice, but we will not say. If he sees a black guy, you know he'll give him a ticket. Not only that, he might bring him down to the station. All of us notice, but because we are politicians, we have to do what we have to do. These discriminations exist. It's not only Islamophobia; it's lots of phobias. Blackphobia, indigenous people—they're all suffering from the same thing, and it's because we do not reach out to the communities.

What we did was we decided we were going to do a peace garden.

In the peace garden, we have the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. Do you see this monument? This is a monument that we have erected to fallen Canadian soldiers. We bring all of Richmond Hill, all the people around there, and we show them what our ethnicity is and what our culture is. We have the statue of Gandhi, the largest statue of Gandhi in Canada, and we tell them, "This is the way of peace." I think the way is to try to let people understand what our...

Madam Chairwoman, you'll have to give me extra time, because this thing is not working.

Anyway, we have a peace park, and in the peace park, we tell people to come and see what peace is about. We tell them to come there, learn about peace, and learn about meditation.

The basic tenets of Hinduism, which I belong to, is that you see God in all beings, not only humans, and this is why Hindus are typically vegetarians. Can you imagine all those people who are fighting against the killing of tigers? They're all vegetarians. Here you are; if you are a Christian, be a good Christian. I do not think any religion, such as Islam, promotes violence or intolerance. Therefore, if we all seriously follow our religion and culture, there should be no discrimination in thought or action.

Madam Chairwoman, in conclusion, I would like to say that although I suffered discrimination at the beginning, at this moment in Canada I do not see any discrimination at my level, or in Hinduism. There is no such thing as "Hinduphobia". Can you imagine? When people speak about religion, they speak about Christianity, or they speak about Judaism, which is about one-thousandth of the number of Hindus, or they speak about Islam, which is a big population, but nobody talks about Hinduism. Do you ever hear Hindus object to it? We say, "Oh well, forget about them. If they don't want to speak about Hindus, then don't speak about us. We are not going to be bothered about that." We want to assimilate people. We want to teach people together. To that effect, on November 4, we are having a Hindu day to let people come to see what Hinduism is. We invite the community; we invite members of Parliament.

One thing is that our politicians should not pander to sects of people for votes. I think one of the speakers spoke about that much earlier. We do that, and when we do that, we cause lots of intolerance for the people who are from here. If our politicians can work properly and understand that when they come and pander to one religious group, other religious groups get intolerant about this.... That's a very serious fact.

I would like to conclude, Madam Chairwoman and the rest of the committee. Thank you for having me.

• (1710)

I think we should let people understand their religion. We cannot come from a different country and try to enforce all our rules and regulations here. If you come to Canada, you must live like Canadians. I'm not saying we should not know our culture. Of course we should know our culture. We must know our culture and we must know our religion, but we belong to Canada. Observe the Canadian rules, do what Canadian law says, and bring people together. By bringing people together, by having more ecumenical services, by having services between all the religious groups together, which we do at our temple, we help to cement people together.

Thank you very much.

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

Go ahead, Ms. Dabrusin.

• (1715)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you. Thank you all for coming and presenting your ideas. I found it really interesting.

My first question is for Mr. Bennett. I appreciate that you were coming to this with your experience as a senior fellow and your experience at the Office of Religious Freedom. As part of the study, we're trying to find some concrete recommendations to make. I'm interested in what you identified as a need for deep and genuine pluralism. You said that social media doesn't help and it's not part of the answer, but you also referred to a need to understand pluralism.

I'll put this in context. We've been presented with Ontario's anti-racism strategic plan and we've seen some recommendations from the United Nations following that same route. How do you see those two dovetailing with what you're discussing—a need for deep and genuine pluralism? How would that fit in an anti-racism strategic plan or a national action plan on racism and discrimination?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: I'm not familiar with the two documents that you cite. Generally, however, elaborating on the idea of a deep and genuine pluralism, I would say that for a long time in our country we have privatized expressions of religious belief and that this privatization has led to an amnesia whereby we forget that people who are religious live their religion completely. They can't separate it publicly and privately. When you privatize religious belief, it leads some people of deep religious faith to feel that they're not full citizens. We can't have that.

We need to have a pluralism in which people of religious belief can live that belief publicly. That means that there will be some friction, some sharp edges, because people will disagree with one another, but we need to facilitate that disagreement, to a point. If people are openly advocating violence against other people, then that's not acceptable, but we need to ensure that there is a robust discourse within our society at all levels.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I'm looking at the recommendations from the United Nations. One recommendation was that Canada develop and launch a new national action plan against racism. I know you're not talking just about racism when you're talking about pluralism. If you were looking at a recommendation for us to put forward to the government, how would government fit into this idea of a deep and genuine pluralism?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: I think government can be a facilitator. I'm always a bit skeptical when government wants to have national action plans and legislate things too much. This is something that is embedded within our society. Government can play a role in facilitating dialogue, bringing communities together, and opening up governments to ensure that those communities have a greater voice.

Thank God we live in a secular state. I would not want Canada to be allied with any particular religious community. However, we don't live in a secular society. We live in a society that is a rich patchwork of different religious traditions, different belief systems. If we want to continue to develop Canada and to grow as a country, to promote a common good, we need to have those voices present. I think government can play a role in bringing communities together, especially where there is ignorance and indifference and fear, to let them speak to one another and to have a frank and open dialogue.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: All right.

I'm going to stay with you for just one more second. Mr. Doobay referred to having a Hindu day and inviting everyone. Is that part of what you're talking about, that we would promote more education about different religions? Is that part of what you would see as a recommendation?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: Again, I don't see government as playing that role. I think government should allow for communities to function at a very local level, but then also, as one of the previous witnesses said, within governments, which is your particular

purview, to ensure that people of religious belief can express themselves. They don't necessarily need to park their beliefs in a little box by their door when they leave and go to the public service in the morning or come to Parliament.

I think there needs to be a greater honesty about the fact that we do have deeply religious people who operate in many different spheres in our country.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes, Julie.

• (1720)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Oh, dear.

The Chair: Actually, no; you have two minutes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: That's better.

Ms. Hassan, you mentioned that there is discrimination. I'm wondering what your suggestions would be. When we're drafting our recommendations, what should we be thinking? What would be a concrete recommendation that you would like to see us put forward to try to respond to discrimination, specifically systemic discrimination?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: First of all, I don't believe systemic discrimination is huge or enormous in this country. There are Muslims who are working in security jobs, in airports as well—

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Sorry, but if I may, when I was talking about that, I meant for all religious groups.

Ms. Farzana Hassan: I see.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Your answer can be that you don't believe there is systemic discrimination. I didn't mean to imply that this had to be the answer.

Ms. Farzana Hassan: As I said, I don't have issues with investigating the causes of so-called anti-Muslim hatred or bigotry. My main issue is with the term "Islamophobia", which I've—

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay. I understood that. You made that point quite clearly. I'm just trying to get to the point that if there is systemic discrimination, we're here to try to come up with some recommendations on how to respond to it.

I will give you an example. One thing we've been asked to look into is hate crimes by collecting data for hate crimes and looking into how we collect data for hate crimes. Is that something you think would be helpful?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: Yes. Absolutely. I think—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Hassan. I really hate to do this, but time is up. We do have a short amount of time for everybody to get in their seven minutes for questions. Maybe you can find a way to work it into one of your answers later on.

Next is Scott Reid, for the Conservatives. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll start with a comment to Dr. Bennett, and then I'll ask Ms. Hassan a question.

Dr. Bennett, you mentioned that some people have deeply held religious beliefs that they can't park at the front door. I would submit to you that virtually every Canadian has deeply held beliefs. Some of them are people who are atheists. People who characterize themselves as agnostic actually have some kind of a deeply rooted, underlying set of beliefs.

I see you nodding, so I suspect you agree.

The point I'm really getting at here, and this is an editorial on my part, is that I think we all have these beliefs of some sort. Some of us are Christian, others Muslim, others atheist, and so on. The problem is when government starts to privilege one set of beliefs over another and says that your beliefs must be left at the door if you have this set and not that set. I'm not talking about the advocacy of violence, which some people purport is part of some deeply held set of beliefs; I'm talking about perfectly legal points of view that, if you have them, make you into some kind of deplorable.

That's just my editorial. I'm sorry; I should give you the right of reply, but I really want to go to Ms. Hassan.

People have been saying, as you heard earlier, that M-103 does not have legislative power. It's a motion, and that's true. However, it calls upon us to write a report to the government, advising them—we're supposed to study this—on how they can develop a whole-of-government approach to eliminating or reducing systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia. That implies that we may well be looking at some form of legislation and at recommending some form of legislation.

The nature of that wording makes it very hard for us as a committee to say that we're setting aside the word "Islamophobia" and instead focusing on what I would have preferred us to focus on, which is an approach to reducing or eliminating all forms of violence, systemic racism, religious intolerance, and discrimination towards Muslims—and, coincidentally, towards Hindus, Christians, Jews, atheists, and others. Given the fact that we're almost certainly going to be pushed into a situation in which the majority on this committee will insist that we include the word "Islamophobia", would it be satisfactory to define "Islamophobia" as I've just done—that is to say, violence or systemic racism, religious intolerance, or discrimination towards Muslims? Would that be a way of squaring the circle, as it were?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: I don't think that would be adequate at all, because that's not how the word is understood in the larger community. You would define it that way in Parliament, yes, but as you said, it's non-binding and there's no legislation at the moment. The way it is understood in many Islamic communities and across the world, it would still be a problematic word. Certainly our jurisdiction is here, but there are other jurisdictions where something like this can be seen in a very negative light and can have very negative ramifications.

• (1725)

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to make sure I understand what you've said, because I might have misunderstood. It sounds as though you're saying that if we adopt this motion and if the government proceeds

with legislation that involves the condemnation of Islamophobia even if we have a definition like the one I just used—which, by the way, is one that I am personally comfortable with, then other countries—I assume you mean some Muslim countries—will then say, "Aha! This means they have effectively approved some of the practices we have in terms of restrictions on...". Is that what you mean?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: I mean that as well, but also within certain segments of the Islamic community here, if one were to question certain Islamic practices, certain segments would have this sort of leverage over whoever would want to challenge Islamic precept and practice. Not everyone is going to go and check what the definition is, the way you've described it or the way you're going to define it, so there will be that whole nebulous area, those grey areas outside of the House of Commons or Parliament that people will be struggling with even outside.

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't know if you were here during the first round of witnesses.

Ms. Farzana Hassan: I wasn't.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. I posited that one of the dangers I'm worried about is a parallel to what's happened in France where Georges Bensoussan, who is a historian, was charged with hate crime for saying—and he did use intemperate language at the very least—that in France anti-Semitism is imbibed with the mother's milk in the Muslim community. For that, he was charged with a hate crime. He was acquitted. He's now being charged again on appeal.

This has had the effect of causing anybody who wants to express concerns about anti-Semitism within the Muslim community—

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: —to be afraid to speak out. The danger that we will countenance one kind of hate speech by trying to silence another too vigorously is one that's on my mind.

Is that a danger, if we're not careful?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: It is a danger, because not everyone is going to be aware of all this, because not everyone will be looking at documents and not everyone will be tapping this resource. There will always be that danger of not knowing what exactly Islamophobia is. It will remain vague in certain communities, so I still have issues with that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

You used a term that I haven't heard before. You talk about Muslim orthodoxy, by which I think you mean, essentially, a clerical establishment. Is that correct?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: That is distinct from other terms we have used, which refer to the doctrinal beliefs. You're actually referring to a hierarchy that you feel—

Ms. Farzana Hassan: I would say that it refers to people who subscribe to a more fundamentalist understanding of Islam.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

I've been expressing a concern about what happens to people who are not Muslims, but let me ask it this way. For people who are reformers within the Muslim community, is there a danger for those individuals as well?

Ms. Farzana Hassan: Absolutely. Someone like me is extremely vulnerable. If something like this were to go through, I would be extremely vulnerable.

It's not just about legal action; it's also about social censure and other things that the motion will start a process towards. That's my fear as well. It's not just about the legalities.

Mr. Scott Reid: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

In that case, Dr. Bennett, you have 30 seconds to respond to my earlier diatribe.

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: Sure.

I would just say on pluralism that keeping genuine pluralism means that you have to allow all beliefs and expressions of belief to exist. You can't say that we have pluralism if you say, "As long as you ascribe to these beliefs, you're in the camp; if you don't, you're anathema." That's not pluralism; that's autocracy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Jenny Kwan for the NDP.

You have seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I'd like to focus on one aspect. Mr. Bennett, I think it was you who offered the comment that there is racism and religious discrimination in Canada. It was something to the effect that there always has been, and I suspect, sadly, that there always will be. To that end, that's where my interest is in terms of this motion, and I think that's the spirit in which this motion was brought about.

There is a lot of discussion about different definitions. I'm not going to get into that debate, because you can spend all day doing that.

What I want to get into, though, are actions that can be taken to address this issue, recognizing that, yes, there is discrimination. Religious discrimination and racism have always been there and always will be, but to the degree to which we can assist in minimizing racism and religious discrimination, what actions can we take as a government in moving forward? Some have suggested a national strategy on anti-racism. Some have suggested, within that strategy, to also put a parallel piece on religious discrimination. I'd like to get your feedback on what action you think this committee should be recommending to the government to address exactly that issue.

● (1730)

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: The first thing is for the committee to reaffirm the fundamental freedoms in section 2 of the charter. We have a charter of rights and freedoms, so we act on it. As I said, the government has a responsibility to uphold the charter.

Second, where government does have jurisdiction in terms of legislation and regulatory frameworks and so forth, whether we see anti-Muslim hatred or whether, as Mr. Worthen, a previous witness, talked about, it's increasing discrimination against physicians and health care workers who hold particular views on euthanasia or whatever it might be, there needs to be more robust protection in various human rights codes for people who have particular views that are deeply rooted in religious belief and conscience, to have those views protected so that they are not discriminated against and they cannot lose their position within a publicly funded hospital or whatever it might be. There are ways in which government can act within its purview, but it would be to strengthen conscience protections and protections for freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.

Again, broadly speaking, government should act as a facilitator within communities to encourage communities to engage with one another.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On the issue around facilitating communities, I too believe the government should particularly help facilitate the NGOs and the community groups that are often trying to do this work without very many resources. It is important also to provide training for government agencies and officials and so on.

If we're going to facilitate that work on cross-cultural and interfaith awareness and education and also provide training, should that be resourced by government within a national strategy, or should it be left up to each community to try to do its own thing?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: It could be included in a national strategy, but again, in terms of where government plays a role of facilitating, in this country we have a representative democracy. You, as members of Parliament, have particular interests over and above that. You have political interests, and Dr. Doobay mentioned this. In facilitating engagement between different communities, the role of NGOs and so forth, there's always a tendency to favour NGOs that agree with a particular political position, no matter what party is advocating it, whether it's the Conservatives, the Liberals, or the NDP, whatever it might be.

If you're going to bring together NGOs and community groups to have that type of dialogue, there has to be a constant check on political inclination, if I can put it that way. You should always be seeking to engage broadly, including with those groups that do not meet maybe a particular ideological test. You should always be seeking to engage those NGOs that maybe disagree fundamentally with a particular discourse in society.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Fair enough.

I want to take it to another area. On the issue around the impact of systemic discrimination, I know some would argue that there has been little or minimal impact, but others would argue that there has been significant impact, particularly for community groups, financially and economically as well.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Our statistics also back that information up in terms of effects of systemic discrimination affecting people's economic situations. On that issue, can you share with us quickly whether or not you think that is an issue, and if so, what action should be taken?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: I don't see it as a systemic issue. I would echo what Ms. Hassan said, which was that a lot of members of different communities where there is discrimination against that community have done very well—and Dr. Doobay used his own example—in Canadian society and have prospered economically, socially, culturally, politically, or however it might be. I'm very worried about focusing too much on a kind of broad reading of systemic discrimination. We need to look historically. Throughout our history there have been particular communities that have faced discrimination. Some have faced much deeper discrimination.

•(1735)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can get you to pause here. Take, for example, the indigenous community. That is an obvious example of a community where I hope we can all agree there has been systemic discrimination that has impacted them significantly, economically, socially, and so on. Would that not require a strategic approach, and would it not apply to other ethnic communities as well?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: We have to be careful to not see first nations as an ethnic community. They have a particular place—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry; I said “and other ethnic communities”. I didn't say the first nations community was an ethnic community. That wasn't what I said.

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: There are certain strategies that are appropriate to particular situations. In engaging different communities where there are examples of discrimination, you have to address those specific cases and try to adopt a broad approach to encourage communities to engage one another and to come to learn from one another. If people can't express themselves and can't say what they believe and why they believe it, then it's hard for people to engage and it's hard to fight that discrimination.

The Chair: I'm afraid we've gone a little over seven minutes. We have one last questioner, and that's Dan Vandal from the Liberals, for seven minutes. This is our first round; we're not going to have a second round.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I'm going to be sharing my time with Julie Dzerowicz. There's not a lot of time, so I'm going to ask my question to Dr. Doobay.

We received ample evidence several weeks ago that hate crimes are on the increase for many different communities, including the indigenous, the black population, and the Jewish and Muslim communities. In the Muslim community there's a 61% increase over the course of one year. I find that extremely troubling. I'm going to go to you, doctor, for advice. What can we do as a government to address this trend?

Dr. Budhendraauth Doobay: Thank you.

The onus should not be on government alone. The onus should be on the communities, as I have alluded to. The onus should be on the communities not to ghettoize themselves and to absorb people around them.

We are new. Those who have been here five generations are no longer new, but we are new. When we are new and we come here, we want people to understand who we are and that we are here for one thing: to work in peace and harmony. To do this, you have to involve the people in the community—neighbours, citizens, the mayor, the town council, the member of Parliament—and let them get to know you. When we do not ghettoize ourselves and we expose ourselves to everyone, they all understand that we are human beings just like them. We eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and have the same objectives. We may worship differently; that's about it. However, when we ghettoize ourselves, we raise the ire of people around us.

There are questions to raise about what government can do. Government in its wisdom can encourage this sort of thing by encouraging people of different faiths to get together and by letting them know that they can't bring the old ways of the old country here to do their own wars, whatever country they come from.

We have to know that we come to Canada. Why do we come here? Because we get a good life. Therefore, we must thank the government, work with the government, and come together. I mentioned the Aga Khan projects and so on. These are some people who are bringing people together. We can't want government to do everything for us.

The worst wars are religious wars. You know that, right? Whether you shake your head or not, the worst wars are caused by religion. Again I want to say that if a community is mostly Hindu or mostly Muslim and we pander to them, we cause lots of difficulties. The communities have to work together, and government should try to see if they can encourage that. That's what I think.

•(1740)

The Chair: Thanks, Dan.

Julie, you have three minutes left.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much.

I'm going to direct my questions first to Mr. Bennett and then to Mr. Doobay.

I'm going to follow along the lines of what my colleague, Ms. Kwan, was saying. I too agree that in this country there is long-standing systemic racism and discrimination. One of the additional comments that I found interesting and that I agree with is that we each have our own biases.

This was not the first time it was mentioned. I believe one of the leaders of the black legal community mentioned this as well. He said that you have to put that on the table when you're trying to come up with a game plan around a whole-of-government approach in trying to reduce or eliminate systemic racism and religious discrimination.

I'm trying to think about that. What additional things might we consider doing to take into account our own biases when we're trying to come up with this approach?

Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett: Very briefly, I think government can lead by example. Government can recognize, as parliamentarians, as leaders in the public service, that if you have a different view, that's perfectly acceptable. You have a right to hold that view.

For example, Cardus, the think tank that I work with is, broadly speaking, a Christian think tank. Three of us who work there are Catholics, and then I have a lot of colleagues who are reformed Protestants or Calvinists. As a Catholic, I think Calvinists have a pretty wacky theology and I think they are wrong on certain points, but I recognize that they bear a human dignity. We work together and have a wonderful working relationship in trying to do good for this country, just as members of Parliament do, but in that environment we are able to engage, to disagree, and to have a way to work together.

I think that within Parliament, within our government, or within the public service, often people feel that they can't disagree or that they have to subscribe to a particular view in order to feel accepted within society. That's not a good trend. We have to foster difference. After all, Parliament comes from the French *parler*, so people have to be free to speak. That example can extend throughout our country.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Would you comment, Mr. Doobay?

Dr. Budhendraauth Doobay: I agree with my friend here, but I feel that we must start at home with our children. A lot of things come from the children at home, even though we think we can settle everything in Parliament. We have to let people understand that we can't teach our children to hate and to grow up like that.

I come back to the old thing of ghettoizing, when we teach the children to hate and to discriminate. As you said, we all have our biases. Every one of us has our biases, even God. We must teach our children from home. This is difficult to do. You may say, "Oh, okay, I will tell them to be this way." You can't. As you know, these biases come deep. They start with the children, who then grow up.

We must try to educate, involve, communicate, and absorb people, not separate ourselves. Absorb people to let them know who we are. This is the only way it can be solved. Government can't solve these things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doobay, Dr. Bennett, and Ms. Hassan, for coming and for presenting your ideas and your thoughts to us. This is all adding to the pool of thoughts that we ourselves are developing in terms of our recommendations. I want to thank you for taking the time, and I would entertain—

Mr. Reid?

Mr. Scott Reid: I have one last thing before you entertain a motion to adjourn, which I will be happy to move in a second.

I just wanted to thank you for allowing us to run a bit over time to allow the witnesses to be heard. I very much appreciated that, and I suspect other MPs did as well.

● (1745)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: I will give a motion to adjourn now.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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