



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

CHPC • NUMBER 079 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, October 23, 2017

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Monday, October 23, 2017

● (1530)

[English]

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

It's Monday, October 23. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee is studying systemic racism and religious discrimination.

We have two witnesses for this hour. We have Serah Gazali and Narges Samimi from Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House in British Columbia, and then we have Mr. Balpreet Singh from the World Sikh Organization of Canada.

Mr. Singh will join us via video conference, so that's why his name is here, but he isn't. We will come to him when his time comes.

I want to explain to the witnesses here the usual format. You have 10 minutes as a group—you can divide it into five minutes and five minutes, or one of you can be the spokesperson for the group—but no more than 10 minutes. Then we will go to a question-and-answer segment. Hopefully Mr. Singh will be here by that time so that we can go straight to him after you have finished.

We will begin for 10 minutes, and I will give you a two-minute warning.

Ms. Narges Samimi (Community Member, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House): Thank you.

The Chair: Who is going to be speaking?

It's Serah.

Ms. Serah Gazali (Community Member, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House): Madam Chair and honourable members, my name is Serah Gazali. Thank you all for your invitation.

This September, 53 people—a diverse group of community members, including first nations, youth, settlement employees, researchers, self-identified Muslims, and Chinese seniors—gathered at Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House in Vancouver. Those attending shared their experiences of systemic racism and religious discrimination. Through a thoughtful and engaged dialogue emerged the recommendations we will present to this committee today.

The dialogue was initiated by the office of Jenny Kwan in response to motion M-103. Today Narges Samimi and I will speak on behalf of Frog Hollow and those who attended the community dialogue. We speak as participants in this dialogue, as members of minority communities, and as individuals whose lives have been impacted by racism. We also speak as Canadians who wish to see a

more equitable and stronger economic life for each person living in this country.

The dialogue generated more than 20 recommendations clustered around five key areas. The first area requires government support for training and education to increase intercultural understanding. We need a national strategy to enhance cultural, racial, and religious tolerance and awareness. Anti-racism and anti-oppression training should be required across all sectors of government, especially for judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials.

Given the pivotal role education plays in socializing children and young adults, the federal government should collaborate with the provinces to ensure that this training is mandatory for all teachers, including college and university professors. The federal government should also provide funding for provinces and territories to revise school curricula and include education on Canada's colonial history, the value of diversity, and cultural inclusivity.

In the second area, we recommend establishing programs to facilitate integration and reduce segregation. This means funding local non-profit organizations and government agencies that are working on a range of anti-discrimination initiatives, especially groups combatting racism and Islamophobia. In addition, the federal government should establish a mechanism by which every recipient of federal funding, regardless of the purpose of that funding, measures and reports back on how their work with the federal funds advances intercultural understanding and combats systemic discrimination.

● (1535)

Ms. Narges Samimi: A third area of consideration is the improvement of labour market access to boost national economic achievement. This set of recommendations speaks to strengthening the Canadian economy by effectively utilizing the rich and diverse talent of Canada's multicultural population.

Government should develop a national strategy for labour market integration that acknowledges the economic inequities and systemic barriers experienced by immigrants, visible minorities, and first nations. Government needs to work with the provinces to amend their employment standards acts to ensure that employees can observe religious holidays, prayer times, and traditional dress without fear of employer reprisal.

We need a federal task force to assess the compatibility of education and credentials from outside of Canada, and we need to speed up the creation of more equitable credential pathways for skilled newcomers. Provincial professional registration practices need to be transparent, objective, impartial, and fair. That may mean helping to establish fairness commissioners in each province, like those already in place in Ontario and Manitoba.

The fourth area recommends fostering institutional participation and leadership. We need to provide support for programs to connect and to promote the participation of first nations and other minorities in paid and unpaid leadership positions. Minorities, especially women of colour, need focused support to overcome systemic barriers and to become leaders and role models across all levels of government and broader society.

The last area includes a suggestion for strengthening the legal response to discrimination. Governments should strengthen laws against hate speech and crimes by providing a much more inclusive and clear definition of hate crime and Islamophobia. We also recommend providing new funding for accessible support and programs for individuals who have experienced the harmful impacts of race- and religious-based forms of discrimination. In addition to preventing or minimizing intergenerational harms, these programs should aim to promote personal empowerment and integration through civic engagement.

Ms. Serah Gazali: Finally, we cannot establish justice while celebrating a legacy of colonialism and the abuse of human rights. Therefore, we must consider the issue of symbols and names that celebrate violence, genocide, and colonialism. We need more honest dialogue about these symbols, and we need to explore productive strategies that help build a collective future based on the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

With global and national racial and religious tension on the rise, your committee has a special responsibility to take immediate action on these recommendations. Together, we have a unique opportunity to build an authentically inclusive vision of Canada where all individuals and their diverse contributions are truly recognized and valued.

Thank you.

The Chair: My goodness, that's beautiful.

Normally we have people going to 10 minutes, but thank you very much.

I want the committee to know that Mr. Singh will not be on video conferencing either. Apparently he was just in a car accident, so let us hope that he is okay and that he has a speedy recovery, whatever happened to him.

As a result, we will only have this one group of witnesses today, and that means we're going to have two rounds for this hour.

Now we begin what is known as a question-and-answer period. The first round is seven minutes, and the questioner and you have seven minutes—not each, but seven minutes for both of you—so try to be as concise as you can in your answers and in your questions.

We will begin now with a question from Ms. Anju Dhillon from the Liberals.

• (1540)

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Good afternoon, and welcome to the committee. Thank you for taking your time to come and testify before us.

Could you talk to all of us a little bit more about discrimination in the workplace? You mentioned employment, and that seems to be a big part of your presentation. Could talk more in detail about that, please?

Ms. Narges Samimi: First of all, it's a really good question.

I was one of those employees who went through that systemic discrimination in the workplace. I was wearing the hijab before, and one day my manager came to me and said, "Narges, if you want to have this job, you need to give up something." I wasn't sure what she was talking about. She said she meant my hijab, that I couldn't have my hijab there because of the place where I worked. She said she didn't want me to change my religion, but she didn't want me to have a scarf on my head there.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Did you ask why?

Ms. Narges Samimi: I was shocked. I told her that she didn't have the right to tell me what to do or wear. I should have the freedom to choose what I should wear, and I left that workplace. I applied to other jobs, and they didn't hire me because of what I was wearing. Unfortunately, I had to give up something, as you can see now.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: I'm very sorry to hear that. Nobody should have to go through what you went through, ever, and we have established this part of the committee. We want to know how we can get rid of systemic discrimination.

Did you ever complain to the provincial human rights tribunal?

Ms. Narges Samimi: I never did that.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: May I ask why? Is it you weren't aware, or...?

Ms. Narges Samimi: At that time I didn't do that, but now I'm taking part in addressing that issue. I wasn't at an age that I could stand up for my rights, but now I realize that if I don't, no one else will.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Exactly. That's why I'm asking you this, because I think a lot of people don't end up stepping forward, so there might be many more instances of systemic racism, especially in the workplace, where people don't get hired because of the way they look, and this is never, ever right. That's why I'm asking if you went or if you were not aware that you could do that.

Does your organization help people figure out what to do if they ever face such discrimination?

Ms. Narges Samimi: The organization is helping not only Muslims; it is helping most of the people who have different faiths and different religions, but I haven't taken the step to sue that company.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

Ms. Gazali, do you have something to add regarding employment and discrimination?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I work with an immigration organization, and I'm also part of a very diverse community. I'm very connected with the Arabic-speaking community and with the Spanish-speaking community because of my previous position.

To perhaps touch on why Narges was not able to deal with that issue at the time, I don't think everybody is aware of their rights. They likely know it is wrong, but they don't know where to go or how to address it. I think many feel that it's a huge hassle for them to try to prove that the other person said what they said, because it's his word against their word, and who is going to be believed?

• (1545)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Have you ever helped those who have gone before the tribunal and faced an issue when they were not believed? Is there a statistic you have?

Ms. Serah Gazali: No, I don't work with the human rights commission. I'm not aware of that.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

Do the immigrants who come to you for help ever have trouble finding jobs?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes, definitely. It's not only people with limited skills or limited language. Some people are engineers and speak English fluently, but they still have issues joining the labour market.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: What would you like us to do as a federal government to rectify this situation?

Ms. Serah Gazali: We mentioned so many things in the recommendations. One of them is to deal with the credentials and to come up with a national policy whereby each province has clear, fair standards.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay. Thank you very much. I think my time is up anyway.

The Chair: Thank you.

I go to David Anderson, for the Conservatives.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for being here with us today.

I'd like to hear a little more about how you put this whole process together. You had a community meeting or a dialogue. How were attendees chosen for the dialogue? Were you invited?

Ms. Serah Gazali: It was an open call. We received it in a short time and at the end of the day. I think it was between 6:30 and 9:00 during a workday, and surprisingly, 53 individuals attended. I think that speaks to how important this issue is to many people.

Mr. David Anderson: How would people have found out about it?

Ms. Serah Gazali: It was through an announcement from Frog Hollow and I think from Kiwassa, and through networking. For example, when I received it, I shared it with friends.

Mr. David Anderson: One of the things you didn't mention in your presentation is that Ms. Kwan organized the whole thing, so I think we should have some clarity and transparency on that as well. It came from her office. The initiative was hers to develop, and then

people were contacted and then invited or allowed to come to this meeting. Is that correct?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I think it was initially through Frog Hollow. They approached Jenny Kwan with this issue, and she agreed to attend.

Mr. David Anderson: From reading the report, it sounded more as if she organized it.

When you were given a series of questions to answer in the evening, who came up with them? How was that organized?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Do you mean the recommendations, or which part?

Mr. David Anderson: The report said you had a series of questions at the beginning of the evening that directed the discussion.

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes. We asked different questions, such as whether anybody faced issues with finding employment, if they faced discrimination at work, whether they experienced racism or religious discrimination.

There were so many questions, and we were surprised that despite our diversity, we somehow either experienced racism, were victims of racism, or were witnesses to instances of racism and bigotry.

Mr. David Anderson: Can you just tell me a little about the contents of the report? I notice on pages 8 and 9, 11 and 12 in the report that you talk about funding for a whole variety of things. If you could, I'd like you to prioritize this in some way, because in small-group discussions, they wanted targeted funding for a national strategy, non-profit organizations, provinces and territories, and different aspects of school curriculums. Later they asked for a complete review of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada funding. There's a mechanism by which all recipients of federal funding have to manage and report back on how they're spending it, a new targeted funding stream to support local non-profits to develop anti-racist, equity-focused initiatives, new funding streams to support monthly or quarterly community-based events, a national web-based portal that someone's going to pay for, targeted funding for media and arts programs, and targeted and new funding for accessible supports.

There are lots of requests there. How would you prioritize them? What would be the top two or three?

I think that would probably be beyond the discussion you had, but did anybody have any idea of what the cost would be of requesting all this funding?

• (1550)

Ms. Serah Gazali: First, we're also taxpayers. We know how the costs of racism affect our lives. If you're asking me what to prioritize, I think that's another issue, but the core issue for us—for me personally and for the 53 individuals who attended the meeting—is our shared vision of Canada as a democratic, pluralistic, inclusive nation, and it's also about our identity as Canadians as a multicultural, egalitarian society.

Mr. David Anderson: Around that discussion of egalitarianism and inclusion, was there any discussion about whether it was appropriate to single out Islamophobia and Islam in the motion? Was there any feeling that this should have been broader? We brought a motion forward with an amendment to it that would have broadened that whole discussion, and it was rejected by the government. Was there any discussion within your dialogue that it's inappropriate to single out just one of these organizations or groups?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I think we're asking for the protection of rights for everybody.

We talked about Islamophobia based on the experiences of individuals who were attending and also based on the recent statistics from Canada that mentioned that Islamophobia is on the rise. It has increased to almost 60%. Muslims are the second most targeted group, after Jews. We have six strategies and laws to target anti-Semitism, but there's no talk about Islamophobia, although—

Mr. David Anderson: Did you talk about a definition of Islamophobia? That's been a big part of our discussion. Did you come to any, or do you have one that you would use?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes. I think we like the definition of Islamophobia as proposed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

I wrote it here. They define Islamophobia discrimination as "... stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general".

Mr. David Anderson: I think that's a partial definition that they use, but thank you.

I have a question for you about—I'm running out of time, actually.

The Chair: You have a little under a minute.

Mr. David Anderson: You suggested that we need to review, change, and strengthen the laws against hate speech. Are you suggesting that we need to change our hate speech laws in this country? Is that one of the conclusions?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I think we need to come up with a particular definition for Islamophobia, and we should criminalize it. There's not enough time to talk about that, but originally I'm from Saudi Arabia. I fled Saudi Arabia because of my gender and I don't really identify as Muslim. However, when I talk about my experiences in Saudi Arabia under a particular regime, Wahhabism, it's always taken by outsiders as a monolithic Islam that applies to every Muslim, and that's not the truth.

The Chair: Thank you. I think you've run out of time.

I'll go to Jenny Kwan for the NDP.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for their presentation and the work they have done in bringing forward this report.

Just to clarify, in terms of the process with respect to this round table, Frog Hollow approached me and said that they were seeing the rise of discriminatory issues in our community. They asked if there was something we could do about that. As it happens, we were just embarking on this process of studying M-103, and I said, "Why don't

we host a community round table and invite the community to share their experiences with respect to that?" That's how this round table came about. I wanted people to be clear about that.

The community—Frog Hollow, Kiwassa Community House, and other community partners—then went on to the process of inviting others to participate. They pretty well ran the show. They got a facilitator and got the whole process going.

I think one of the things that I'm particularly interested in, which you didn't have a chance to present in your testimony today, is the lived experiences of the people who attended the event and some of the stories that they shared with us around what they faced. I wonder whether you could share a couple of those stories with us today and explain how they relate to the recommendations that you have put forward before us.

• (1555)

Ms. Narges Samimi: Yes. I remember there was a woman of about my age who had some difficulties. She was attending PE classes, and her teacher approached her and said, "You should think of the limitations you have from wearing a hijab", but she was so eager to learn and to do a lot of the sports that she didn't think about any limitations. She didn't think her head scarf would bring her limitations.

As a young Muslim woman, I don't think religion and faith and the way we dress should bring us limitations. I'm so proud of her that despite all the challenges and struggles and difficulties she had in her class and with her teacher, she still continues to do sports, to be very strong, and to be a great athlete.

Do you want to add something?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

I think there is an issue. We've discussed it in the group. I also notice it because of my work with the community and my connections, and also because of my research. People who are visibly different—be it because of their accent, be it because of the way they are dressed, particularly for Muslims who are wearing hijabs, or be it because of their skin colour—will always tell me about experiences of racism. It could be direct. It could be acts of micro-aggression, such as being made to feel not welcome. Sometimes it could be direct verbal abuse, when they're called terrorists or somebody screams at them that they don't belong there.

This is part of what they deal with on a daily basis.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Hence I guess the story about the young woman who experienced the comments from her teacher about her hijab and about her ability to participate in the events in her physical education class really points to the need for education and awareness, even amongst the educators themselves.

I see in your recommendation that you're talking about the need for training. To that end, I gather that these would be the recommendations you've forwarded about where resources need to be put. That's within the context of a national strategy to address the issue of racism and religious discrimination. Am I correct in understanding that?

• (1600)

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Ms. Narges Samimi: It has to be within education programs and training, even throughout the government system.

Ms. Serah Gazali: It's important that the people who are in a position of power have this understanding. We sometimes get direct training about anti-oppression and anti-racism. We get it as racialized people. We don't need that training. We need the people who are dictating policies, the people who have power, to get that training.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That would be the need, then, for a national strategy in terms of resources being provided to each of the provinces. This work could be done, and everybody would have the opportunity to provide that training in the school system—for example, to the educators in our school system.

On the issue around discrimination impacting an individual, we know that discrimination is a learned behaviour. We know that it can have a lifelong impact on an individual. In that context, I see that you have a recommendation that deals with the issue of addressing the implications of discrimination for an individual in the long term in terms of their financial outlook and so on. Can you elaborate on that for me?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Kwan; time's up.

Julie Dabrusin is next.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you both for your presentations. I like that you've brought in some stories of lived experience and what you heard at your round table.

Going through some of the recommendations you made, I notice you mentioned one in respect of federal funding, looking to see if the recipients were taking action against systemic discrimination. Was that basically what the recommendation was?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Some other witnesses have talked about using something similar to gender-based analysis and using that type of a lens. Is that what you're talking about?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes, exactly.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Can you give me an idea of what that would look like? If we were using that kind of a lens, what do you think it should take into account? What would it look like?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Well, it would cover so many things, but an example could be affirmative action to ensure that racialized people, minorities, and first nations people are part of the workplace. We were talking about making sure that all fund receivers also apply these policies. It has to be part of a financial strategy. We don't think of it as a waste of taxpayer money because we are taxpayers, and we have to benefit as well.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Have you talked at all about programs of community benefits—I'm sure you're well aware of how community benefits agreements work—under which you have certain percentages or targets of people who would be employed to develop skills in an area, and you can have it arranged in different ways?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Would that fit into what you're talking about?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes. We want measurable results, not symbolic acts.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I'm happy that you brought up measurable results, because the idea of disaggregated data and how to get proper data for what we're doing has been coming up a lot. I don't know if you've had a chance to look at the Ontario action plan.

The Ontario plan advocates addressing racial inequities in part through “better race-based disaggregated data, data that can be broken down so that we can further understand whether specific segments of the population are experiencing adverse impacts of systemic racism.”

Would you agree that's something we should—?

• (1605)

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The plan also recommended having a “standard framework and guidelines to ensure data is collected consistently.” Would that fit within your recommendations?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you. It's good to see where things line up.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is a United Nations convention, put out a report in September of this year, and they made several recommendations. You talked about strengthening the legal response to discrimination. The report contained a section on hate crimes and recommended steps to prevent them. They also recommended facilitating reporting by victims. What could the government do to facilitate reporting by victims of hate crimes?

Ms. Serah Gazali: They could do so many things.

First they could make sure that they don't need to report because they are not facing discrimination in the first place.

The second thing is to give them the tools to be empowered, to make sure they know their rights, and that means funding for organizations and agencies, perhaps within the workplace training, to inform people about their rights.

Third, they could be funding and giving resources to agencies receiving those complaints.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: As I understand it, there would be training for the recipient agencies, whatever they would be, and also funding to get information out to people so that they understand their rights. Is that right?

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes, and they could perhaps criminalize hate speech and Islamophobia in the first place.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: On the facilitating reporting piece again, within your organization and the work you do, do people tell you about any specific barriers that prevent them from making these reports? We just want to get an idea of what the barriers are.

Ms. Serah Gazali: What kind of reports do you mean?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I mean the hate crime reports. Sorry.

Ms. Serah Gazali: I think they talk about it among themselves. Perhaps it's normalized, so they don't think of it as something that really needs to be addressed. We're not doing anything about it, and so we do not have to have high expectations with regard to why people are not reporting.

If you take the example of laws that are to protect women's rights at the workplace, we do have those rights, but still, because of the power hierarchies, women sometimes cannot report about sexism at work.

Ms. Narges Samimi: Also, not everyone has the courage to do that. People need money or they are scared for their lives, so they don't have the courage to report those kinds of hate crimes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you. That's helpful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to go into the second round. We have news that Mr. Singh may actually be able to come on for the second hour. He will be the first person up in the second hour on video because the place where he's doing it closes at 5:00, so we're accommodating him on that.

Now we go to the second round, beginning with Mr. Anderson for the Conservatives for three minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you. Mr. Reid will take the round.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, you have three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you very much.

Ms. Dabrusin made reference to a report. Could we request that the committee accept that—it's a United Nations report—into evidence, and if it's available in both official languages, that copies be circulated to all members? I think we ought to, as a group, be trying to familiarize ourselves with the relevant United Nations materials relating to Canada's current human rights performance.

•(1610)

The Chair: Yes, I think that would be fine, because we need all the information we can get that's not necessarily given by a witness. That's part of our background information. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

You made a number of recommendations. Some of them have been dealt with, and I appreciate those. There is one that I have to say I take issue with, and I'm going to explain why. I'm saying it not as a criticism of you; I'm saying it as a way of putting the issue before the members before this committee.

Your recommendation number 4 on page 18 proposes to:

Mandate the removal of symbols that celebrate violence, genocide, and colonialism. This recommendation may include changing the names of educational institutions (e.g. schools named in memory of Sir John A. Macdonald) and streets (e.g. Colonization Road), as well as restoring Indigenous names for cities and regions.

I think on the whole there's lots of merit to that, but I just want to stop and pull Sir John A.'s name out of that.

He, of course, was our first prime minister. If we take the approach that Sir John A. Macdonald is someone who is unfit to be celebrated and that anything named after him should have its name changed, then we also, I think, have to—and this would be presumably over

his record vis-à-vis aboriginal relations—take away anything named after Sir Wilfrid Laurier, our second major prime minister, who took away the vote from aboriginal people after Sir John A. had given it to them. We'd have to rename anything named after Sir Robert Borden, our third long-serving prime minister, who after all, during World War I, locked up Ukrainian civilians; Mackenzie King, our longest-serving prime minister, who locked up Japanese-Canadians during World War II; and Louis St. Laurent, who served in the forties and fifties and who kept aboriginals from voting until John Diefenbaker finally gave them that right in 1960. As well, presumably Mr. Diefenbaker and Mr. Pearson, who were our prime ministers in the sixties, are morally responsible for the sixties scoop of young aboriginal people from their parents.

The point I'm making here is that I think we need some kind of perspective when we're doing these things that distinguishes between these acts—which are not excusable—and the people who did them, who were simply not monsters and who were not unfit to be honoured in other aspects. I just wanted to get that on the record. You provided me with the opportunity. This issue has come up before.

That said, there may well be merit to doing other things, such as reviewing some of the other names that are problematic.

I don't know if I used up my time.

The Chair: You've just gone past your three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm sorry. All right.

Having said that, I really appreciate your testimony. It was very informative. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Arif Virani, for the Liberals. You have three minutes, Mr. Virani.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): I didn't hear the first part of your testimony, so I apologize if any of this is repetitive.

We've heard a bit about assisting communities where they are throughout the country. We've also heard some previous submissions from other people who have appeared before this committee to talk about how things had worked in the past.

I wanted to ask you about integration, which you touched on earlier, and how it would work. If we were to look at past examples of funding at Heritage Canada, it was not just for groups communicating with other groups—meaning an Italian group communicates with a Jamaican group, just as a hypothetical—but for assisting groups unto themselves, through community capacity grants or community development grants, so that communities can better understand how the Canadian system operates and better understand their own needs and then work to integrate within the Canadian polity or culture.

Is that something that makes sense to you, and if so, why? Could you explain that to us a little?

Ms. Serah Gazali: We mentioned examples of how that can be achieved in many points in the recommendations.

There are so many. Some of them are about funding for starting a conversation within the community, or funding for media, because this is a huge issue, particularly for the new Arab community. They would love to know what's going on in the English news, but they cannot access it because of the language. Also, the media do not really cover issues that are relevant to them. They can get subtitles, but it's not really relevant to them. They are not well covered by the media. They need forums where they can practise that.

That's what I can think of off the top of my head, but we add so many points in the recommendations.

• (1615)

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to Mr. Reid, for the Conservatives, for three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll actually ask a question this time. Thank you for putting up with my diatribe earlier.

Ms. Gazali, you made a reference to some people being discriminated against because they are women, some because they are members of a religious minority. Of course, we also have people who are members of racial minorities.

This is something I've been trying to figure out. I've been trying to figure out how one distinguishes how to deal with these things, both from a statistical point of view—because we want to gather statistics on both hate crimes and non-criminal forms of discrimination—and also in terms of redress. I'm genuinely uncertain how one approaches that from a practical point of view.

Ms. Serah Gazali: Statistics Canada distinguishes between discrimination based on gender and discrimination based on religion. However, they do not really see a connection between an act of racism based on race and one based on religion, because the perpetrators of hate crimes do not really distinguish between the two. They just look at the person and assume, because of their looks, that they belong to a certain religion.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think that with an actual hate crime, it's sometimes easy to tell. In the case of the man who went into the mosque in Quebec City, his victims were all men, but had they been all women, it would have been obvious that he was attacking them because they were Muslims, not because they were women.

In the case of discrimination, I would think it's much harder to tell. If someone doesn't hire you for a job or finds some excuse not to rent to you—that kind of thing—it would be much harder to tell what the basis was. Am I wrong?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I'm not sure about statistics for the particular scenario you're describing, but Narges just mentioned that when she was trying to find a job, just because she was wearing a hijab she was not hired. The moment she took it off, she got a job.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're right. No, that case is very clear. That's a valid point. Do the statistics actually capture that information, to your knowledge?

Ms. Serah Gazali: I'm not sure that they do, but discrimination, hate speech, and violence in the recent statistics were rising even more for women who are Muslims. I think that's particularly because they're just visible.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's easier to figure out who's who.

Ms. Serah Gazali: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go to Julie Dzerowicz. I keep calling you different things all the time, Julie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): It's okay. Every time someone says my last name, I just say, "That's perfect." As long as people attempt it, I'm fine.

Anyway, thank you so much for your wonderful presentations, Thanks for your patience with all of our questions.

I think I actually misunderstood Ms. Samimi's example. For some reason I thought you were already working, and then they had come up to you and said that because you were wearing a hijab they didn't think you should be working there. My understanding is that you were already hired, and then they mentioned that to you. Was my understanding correct, or were you looking for a job?

Ms. Narges Samimi: Yes, I was working.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: They had hired you, and—

Ms. Narges Samimi: Then they realized it wasn't what they wanted—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay.

Ms. Narges Samimi: It wasn't right to have a Muslim woman in their workplace.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Did they say that, or did they say that they just didn't want someone wearing a hijab? What was the—

Ms. Narges Samimi: They clearly came up to me and said, "You should give up on your job. We are okay with your personality, with the way you work for us, but we are not okay with your hijab."

• (1620)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's very difficult in those circumstances, by the way, to actually think of what to say, how to respond, and who to even talk to after that. It's very difficult. It would be difficult for me as much as it seemed for you.

I guess my question is this. What would have made you feel comfortable to go to the next step, to maybe seek someone out and say that this was something that you don't agree with? Is it more knowledge? Is it that there was maybe an independent person you could have gone to? What are some elements that might have enabled you to go to someone and say that something had just happened to you that you didn't think was necessarily fair, and you didn't feel your charter rights were protected?

You might not have an answer now, but it's a just a question that came to mind.

Ms. Narges Samimi: It really would be a great thing to know there is someone you can approach who can help you, knowing that you have the right to report that hate speech and hate crime.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you for that.

I know that you're from east Vancouver. I'm from Toronto, downtown Toronto. We're very diverse, and there are a lot of different nationalities and cultures. What advice might you have, because I know you had a round table and there were a number of people and cultures around the table? We're looking at an education program that might be beneficial or positive in terms of talking to a number of different cultures at the same time who might be talking about systemic racism and discrimination. Do you have any advice around that?

The Chair: That will have to be very quick advice, Ms. Samimi, because you're over time. Can you give that advice in one quick sentence?

Ms. Narges Samimi: I would like to have that education training not only for Muslim women, but for every Canadian.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Jenny Kwan for three minutes.

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

With the situation in British Columbia, in 2002, B.C. eliminated our human rights commission. B.C. is the only province in this country without a human rights commission. That's just to provide a context for how difficult it is for people who run into these situations to have redress or to know where to go, especially for young workers out in the workforce, often for the very first time.

That said, our new government is trying to bring back a human rights commission, but that work is under way at the moment with respect to consultations. I just want to put that in context.

Very quickly, I asked that last question about financial impact. We heard at the event a woman who spoke about the lifelong implications of facing racism and how it impacts an individual with respect to self-esteem, and how that would have implications in terms of a financial outcome into the future, and so on.

I wonder if you can quickly elaborate on that, and suggest what government can do and should do with respect to addressing those kinds of implications.

Ms. Serah Gazali: I'm going to reiterate the examples. I think it was testimony from a Ph.D. who was wearing a hijab, and she is very eloquent. She is very well versed on the topic of race and the kind of issues she'd face, because that's her scholarship. She was saying that after she gets her Ph.D. she's not sure she's going to have a job, because of her experience and because of her husband's experience. He has to look for a job abroad, because nobody will give him a position—I think he also has a Ph.D.—that is not an entry position.

A good proportion of the people I know are well educated. They have either graduate or above graduate education, but our pay grade is low, because we still have to struggle and find entry-level jobs.

The issue is about knowledge. It's an issue of which body carries that knowledge, and I think the knowledge of racialized minorities is always questioned.

• (1625)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I think your story is on page 15 of the report. Let me put this on the record. She said:

I don't care who likes me, who doesn't like me but there is a need to change the system that allows me to be here as a Muslim immigrant but doesn't allow me to achieve the social and economic integration I am here for. When we talk about racism, we often talk about these experiences as 'feelings' – personal attitudes, but racism doesn't only have impacts on our feelings. It has impacts on our lives and life opportunities, it impacts the unemployment rates, domestic violence, mental illness, radicalization, youth delinquency. Muslims have 14.4% rate of unemployment – the highest after Indigenous people. Canadian Muslims are well educated. Census figures indicate that among those fifteen years of age and older, 56 percent of Muslims had a form of post-secondary education, compared to 44 percent of the total Canadian population.

The Chair: I'm sorry; we're going to have to wrap that up, please. You can check it in the report itself.

Just before we end this session, I think Mr. Anderson has a point of clarification.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to give a couple of people an opportunity to clarify something here. I was confused by the answer to one of my questions. In the report, twice it says: "...this dialogue was initiated by the office of Jenny Kwan, Member of Parliament for Vancouver East, in response to Motion 103...."

Then it says: "...it was a natural fit when Jenny Kwan's office approached Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House to take a leadership role in surveying...in response to the...tensions identified in M-103."

I would like to be a little clearer about who initiated this. I think it makes a difference to the committee's treatment of the content of the report if it was initiated from Ms. Kwan's office through a neighbourhood. That's different from people in a neighbourhood coming to us and saying, "We'd like you to participate."

The Chair: I don't understand, Mr. Anderson, why who initiated this data and information could make a difference.

Mr. David Anderson: It's because Ms. Kwan said she did not initiate it, and I wondered if she would clarify that.

The Chair: All right. Could we have a very quick answer, please? We have to move on.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: As I outlined earlier in my seven minutes, Madam Chair, at a community event at Frog Hollow we were discussing the rise of discriminatory activities in our community. The audience said they would love to do some work around that, and I said we could work to see how we could collaborate on this issue.

As it happens, we were studying M-103, so why didn't we host a round table on that? To that end, I said to Frog Hollow that we should do something like that. They then took the initiative and engaged other community groups, such as the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, among others, and then we had this round table. That's how it came to be.

The Chair: Thank you.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Anderson?

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to come, and I would like us to go in camera for five minutes. That means that anyone who is not a member of the committee or staff of a member of the committee may not be in the room.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1635)

The Chair: The meeting will come to order, please.

Thank you.

I think these are who we have here, and if Mr. Singh comes in, we'll bring him in at that point in time.

I'll introduce the Manitoba Islamic Association.

You do not have names, so I don't know who you are. Who is here from the Manitoba Islamic Association?

Dr. Idris Elbakri (Past President, Manitoba Islamic Association): This is Idris Elbakri, the past president of the Manitoba Islamic Association.

Mr. Osaed Khan (President, Manitoba Islamic Association): My name is Osaed Khan, the current president of the Manitoba Islamic Association.

The Chair: You're both from the Manitoba Islamic Association.

You have 10 minutes to present, and I'll give you a two-minute warning at eight minutes so you know that you can end, and then we'll go to a question-and-answer session.

You can take five minutes each or you can decide who will be the spokesperson.

Thank you. Go ahead for 10 minutes, please.

Dr. Idris Elbakri: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Honourable members, thank you for the invitation to contribute to this important discussion on behalf of the Manitoba Islamic Association, or MIA.

My name is Idris Elbakri. I am the past president of the MIA. My colleague is Mr. Osaed Khan, the current president of the MIA. We are honoured to be here to present a perspective based on our experience and work as a grassroots community organization. We thank the committee for listening to the many community voices throughout the country, as it is a very important part of this process.

There are approximately 20,000 Muslims in Manitoba. The majority live in Winnipeg. We have communities in Brandon, Thompson, Winkler, and Altona.

Our organization, the MIA, was formally founded in 1969. The MIA is a grassroots organization that serves Manitobans, including Muslims, through three mosques and a community centre that is a cultural, recreational, and educational hub in Winnipeg.

In our presentation today, we would like to share with you why we are concerned about racism, discrimination, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of discrimination. We will share with you how, as a community, we have responded, how we have collaborated with diverse communities, and what more can be done to combat the disturbing trend of increased bigotry.

While I will speak from the perspective of a Canadian Muslim, I do so with the knowledge that indigenous Canadians suffer most from racism, and that racism affects us and hurts us all.

According to Statistics Canada, hate crimes against Muslims have increased by 253% between 2012 and 2015. In 2015, the most targeted racial group was the black community. That same year, the most targeted group was the Jewish community. From 2014 to 2015, there was an 86% increase in hate crimes targeting gay and lesbian Canadians.

We will share with you a few incidents that have occurred in our communities.

Imagine coming home on New Year's Eve to find a gift box at your doorstep. In it is a rock painted with the words "Die, Jew".

Imagine being a newcomer family just starting the long path towards settlement and integration, still learning the language, only to find graffiti on your fence telling you, "Go back to your country".

Imagine taking a leisurely stroll in a public park and finding graffiti proclaiming "White Power" or lamenting "The lost white civilization".

Imagine your mosque employee going through the day's mail only to find that someone mailed you a strip of bacon to express their disdain for your faith and your community.

When we as a community sought a minor rezoning permit, we were met with virulent comments online, such as "We need to put our foot down and stop appealing to this Islam".

In the spring of this year, the photo of a Muslim family from Manitoba was featured as part of a promotional campaign for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Online trolls posted comments like these, and I quote: "This is an oxymoron as the people pictured in this ad do not believe in equal human rights"; "Muslims funded this place through the UN, Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas. Canada is lost. Canada needs to boot Islam out before it is too late"; and "They are illegally invading our country and that is who you put as your cover".

We are concerned. We know that there will always be racism; however, what I have just shared with you is a sampling of incidents that have occurred in the past two years only. We are experiencing a palpable increase in incidents that raise serious concerns in our communities, whether they be Muslim, Jewish, people of colour, or others.

We are also concerned about those fringe racists who mostly spread their message online or spray graffiti under the cover of night. We are worried that they are going to attempt to claim public space and normalize their message as part of our nation's discourse. Recent attempts by the so-called Worldwide Coalition Against Islam to hold several rallies are an example of that.

• (1640)

Recent polls indicate that Canadians far and wide are also concerned. In March 2017, an Angus Reid poll showed that 66% of Canadians believed that the Quebec City shooting was a sign of deeper problems. In the same poll, 61% of Canadians believed that Canadian Muslims face a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Roughly 40% of Canadians said, "Lots of people I know are distrustful of Canadian Muslims." A provincial breakdown of these results is also available.

Earlier last month, a poll by Think for Actions found that 72% of Canadians believe there is an increasing climate of hatred and fear towards Muslims in Canada and that it will get worse.

Mr. Osaed Khan: Manitobans by and large have responded to these incidents of hatred with an outpouring of love and support for one another. We understand our responsibility as citizens to stand in solidarity with each other and not let any community shoulder this burden alone.

On the day that worshippers were killed in Quebec City, our mosque was filled with thousands of friends and neighbours who came to express sympathy and love. Communities that suffer from racism and discrimination have come closer and are working together more than ever before. All levels of government in Manitoba have unequivocally spoken against instances of hatred and discrimination. In Winnipeg, the attempt to hold a rally by the Worldwide Coalition Against Islam failed because the community mobilized a counter-rally in a show of unity and love.

As a Muslim community, we have intensified our efforts to educate fellow Canadians who wish to have a better understanding about who we are. Our mosque and organizations offer many opportunities: interfaith dialogue, open houses, seminars, classes, tours, and guest speakers. Also, internally within our community, we emphasize the importance of respecting the diversity of our nation. For example, for two years in a row, we have run summer day camps emphasizing diversity and multiculturalism.

Dr. Idris Elbakri: Governments can play an important role in supporting initiatives and projects that create understanding between Canadians of all walks of life. Education, in addition to our existing hate laws, is our best defence, and offence, in dealing with racism and hatred. We need to empower our communities to continue the work they do, to partner with one another and to work with school divisions, law enforcement, and social services to create the awareness and understanding needed to support the victims of hatred and racism. Government can also play an important role in creating a better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon of racism and discrimination as they re-emerge in different forms and target different victims.

Finally, I'd like to end by saying that it is critical that our elected officials exercise moral leadership when it comes to racism and discrimination. We need to hear it loud and clear from all political parties and all elected officials that in Canada people will receive respect based on simple human dignity, regardless of creed, colour, gender identity, or sexual orientation. We expect our elected leaders to uphold this principle and to be an example to us all.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, from the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have Mansoor Pirzada, Ayse Akinturk, and Haseen Khan.

Again, the same rules apply. It is 10 minutes for your group, and you can decide who's going to speak.

We can begin now.

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada (President, Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I greet you with this Islamic greeting: [*Witness speaks in Arabic*]. May peace, mercy, and the blessings of God be upon you all.

My name is Mansoor Pirzada. I'm a dermatologist by profession, currently practising in St. John's. I'm the president of MANAL, the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are a charitable non-profit organization managed by volunteers who have their own professional careers. We are engaged in religious, educational, and outreach activities, as well as close partnerships with other faith groups. Our mission is to contribute to the well-being of our members, the larger community of our province, and our fellow Canadians.

The Muslim population in Newfoundland and Labrador is over 2,000. We had a recent boost with the arrival of around 200 Syrian refugees. Madam Chair, probably to the surprise of many, the experience of Muslims living in our province has historically been more positive than negative. The credit is shared among various stakeholders, and I would like to begin with the greatest one, and that is the people of our province.

Our weather in Newfoundland and Labrador can be tough, but we are blessed with a mild human climate. Our people are famous for their hospitality, kindness, and welcoming attitude. Their great human qualities are best documented through the most recent Broadway musical *Come from Away*. In a nutshell, it is the story of a small community that welcomed passengers on 9/11 flights diverted to rural Newfoundland and Labrador. What is not documented is how the same people treated their Muslim friends and neighbours in the aftermath of this tragedy. With their great wisdom, they realized that Muslims were the indirect victims.

They always supported us whenever the beautiful name and the teachings of our religion were hijacked as a pretext for cruel atrocities. In the aftermath of the tragic incident in Quebec City, our political and religious leaders came together to attend our Friday service to demonstrate their solidarity. While we were praying inside, over 1,500 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians from all walks of life formed a symbolic, yet very powerful, human shield around our mosque.

Madam Chair, the second stakeholder to be credited for our unique positive experience is our own Muslim community. We truly consider our province as our homeland. We embrace and practise the same great human qualities as our fellow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Our Muslim community is diverse, yet very inclusive. We contribute to the prosperity of our province, not only as hard-working, tax-paying, and law-abiding citizens, but as culturally interesting and friendly neighbours.

Muslim international students and faculty members bring in world-class educational and research experience. Muslim professionals work in various sectors, ranging from health to the oil and gas industry. Muslim entrepreneurs run small and large businesses. Our children and youth boost the aging demographic of our province. Even our mosque is unique in Atlantic Canada, because it is the only one that was built as a mosque right from scratch. This is the only mosque in North America that was built by the collective efforts of the followers of two major sects of Islam, Sunnis and Shias. As of today, this is the only mosque in North America where Sunnis and Shias pray together. Madam Chair, this is our example and message of inclusiveness to all Canadians and the world.

The third stakeholder feeding into our mild human climate is the unique nature of leadership in our province. Historically, our political and religious leaders have always been constructive. They have helped in promoting a safe and welcoming environment for the residents, including Muslims. While visible minorities in parts of the country have been victims of hate crimes, peace and tranquillity prevail in our province.

Madam Chair, I also would like to acknowledge the positive role of our media. Most recently, on May 25, CBC's *Here and Now* played a special edition on Islam from our local mosque. The program was greatly appreciated by viewers for its educational nature. I recall one social media commentator who wrote that the program positively changed his previously held negative perception about Muslims.

Madam Chair, haters exist everywhere, and even our province is not completely immune to hatred. So far our experience of Islamophobia in our province has been limited to hate speech in virtual platforms, as well as indirect and subtle interventions in public spaces.

- (1650)

However, more recently we've started observing a worrying change. In a community consultation we attended a few weeks ago, representatives of our provincial human rights commission pointed out that the number of Islamophobia-related complaints they receive has recently increased. What is equally alarming is that these complaints are now more about everyday encounters in public spaces, such as shopping malls, grocery stores, and so on.

More recently, during the Thanksgiving holiday, our community woke up to the news of Islamophobic posters all over the Memorial University campus. The trend is now considered alarming enough to warrant addressing Islamophobia consultations among community and university stakeholders. Their priority is to find ways to increase institutional capacities of service providers to address the Islamophobia in our province.

Although our experience has historically been positive, we are still worried about the future. Our main question is, for how long will our unique positive experience continue? Will it prevail as a role model for the rest of Canada, or are we going to lose it to the pervasiveness of hatred?

Madam Chair, I know there is ongoing debate about the exclusive use of Islamophobia in motion M-103, and some lack of consensus about its merit, meaning, and implications. I don't want to waste our

time by reproducing this debate. However, I must say that the notion of Islamophobia has a strong conceptual merit in capturing the complexity of the problem we are dealing with, and it offers significant insight into the root cause. It reminds us that Muslims experience racism and discrimination because of their religious affiliation with Islam. It captures the mutually reinforcing processes of demonizing Islam and dehumanizing Muslims. It exposes that it is due to their affiliation with Islam that Muslims are categorically perceived as one single race that is inferior, uncivilized, and deserving of hostile treatment. This is why non-Muslims sometimes end up being targeted when they are perceived as Muslims.

Our national unemployment statistics and research data comparing our poverty rates with other developed countries suggest that Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon in Canada. For instance, according to 2001 Statistics Canada data, Muslims in Canada have the highest unemployment rate by religious group. Similarly, in 2007 Canada had the largest gap between Muslim and non-Muslim poverty rates in comparison to the U.S., France, Germany, Spain, and Britain.

Therefore, we have every reason to argue that Islamophobia really stands out in our age as one of the most pervasive manifestations of racial and religious discrimination. This is why it deserves specific acknowledgement. Moreover, it is in the context of the Quebec city tragedy that Muslim Canadians are entitled to expect your committee to unanimously acknowledge and thoroughly address Islamophobia.

Madam Chair, the elephant is already in our Canadian store. It has already caused irrevocable damage, not only to Canadian Muslims but to all Canadians who are collectively woven into the beautiful fabric of our society. Now is not the time to play around words and politics. It is time to be united to minimize and ultimately eliminate this serious threat.

As a community leader, I am concerned with the rise in Islamophobic incidents in our province and their negative impact on Muslim women and youth especially. I consider women and youth as the future of the country. As Canadians, we cannot and shall not discriminate against them. Otherwise, we would be defying not only our own core Canadian values but also Canada's demographic and economic interests.

If we want to continue to move forward on the path of past economic and social success, we must tap the unrealized human talent and skill sets that reside in our visible minorities. We must together work as Canadians to eliminate this cancer of systemic racism, religious discrimination, and Islamophobia once and for all. It is only then that we can all call ourselves Canadians without any qualifier of race, colour, language, or religion.

Our recommendations are as follows. I will shorten them a bit. Number one is creating a national registry. The second is to introduce awareness and training programs. Third, develop and introduce programs to support victims of Islamophobia and protect vulnerable ones. Fourth is to introduce and implement appropriate tools that would promote equity and inclusion and eliminate racial and religious barriers to employment. In that context we need to use an equity lens to undertake diversity and equity analysis in our budget preparation.

We hope that the work of the honourable committee members will lead to the development of appropriate strategy to support equity, justice, tolerance, and inclusion in our beloved country. Canadian Muslims are ready to present themselves as agents of positive change. They only need to be reassured about their safety as well as their inherent and acquired dignity in Canadian society.

Thank you. God bless Canada. Long live Canada.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a really rapid ending there. We could have given you an extra few seconds to finish off, but thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the question-and-answer period. The question-and-answer segment consists of questions by committee members, and that includes the questions and the answers.

I will begin by recognizing Dan Vandal for the Liberals. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): First of all, thank you to both groups for your very thoughtful and passionate presentations.

I'm going to go first to the Manitoba Islamic Association.

Welcome.

I know that you began your presentation by speaking about statistics. It was very quick. Could you repeat very quickly some of the stats that you referenced to begin your presentation?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: Yes, for sure.

Some of the statistics we referenced were from the Statistics Canada study, which showed that hate crimes against Canadian Muslims increased by 253% between 2012 and 2015, that the most targeted racial group was the black community, that the most targeted group of all was the Jewish community, and that there was an 86% increase in hate crimes targeting gay and lesbian Canadians.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Do you have statistics that are exclusively for Manitoba?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: No, these are Canadian statistics.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay. You don't have any stats for our province.

Dr. Idris Elbakri: From the Winnipeg Police Service we know that in 2015 there were 19 confirmed cases of hate crimes and two suspected cases of hate crimes. They don't have data more recent than that at this point.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Based on your experiences and your communication with some of your members, do you get the sense that hate crimes are on the rise? Are they on the rise against the Muslim community in Manitoba, are they the same, or are they going down?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: Obviously, we are reporting anecdotal evidence from media reports and from community members, but I think we're confident in saying that we have seen a spike over the past couple of years in the number of incidents—against Muslims and members of other communities, but definitely against Muslims—that have come to light to us as a community, as well as in the media.

There are things that we haven't seen in the past that we're seeing now. In the past, every few years there would be an act of vandalism or graffiti on the walls of the mosque, but now we're getting hate mail. Again, bacon is mailed to us. We had a member of the community who had bacon left on his windshield, which was very concerning, because his car was in a public parking lot, so someone was targeting him specifically. We can confidently say that based on the anecdotes that we have, there has been a spike, an increase, in the incidents targeting Muslims.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

Could you speak a little bit about what role the spread of misinformation contributes to the climate of increased hate crimes and general fear? Speak a little bit about the role of the misinformation that's out there in our communities and in our cities.

I would like both groups to answer that.

Dr. Idris Elbakri: We do a lot of outreach. We have speakers go to visit churches, schools, and other institutions. We get a lot of questions that are just flat out the result of misinformation. People are receiving misinformation that creates fears of things like sharia law and certain cultural practices that exist in some parts of the world, and they think that these things are going to come to Canada. I think this is the environment that leads people to have a lot of suspicion, and that can fuel those who can take the suspicion all the way to actually targeting someone about it.

• (1700)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

Perhaps the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador can address that question.

Mr. Haseen Khan (Executive Committee Member and Treasurer, Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador): I think the campaign of misinformation is a very dangerous thing, because it creates confusion, dislike, and hate in the minds of innocent and neutral people. As Dr. Pirzada mentioned in his speech, when CBC's *Here and Now* released a documentary on Islam 101, we received a lot of feedback: "Thank you very much. Now I see the true picture of Islam. I have changed my opinion and my misconceptions about Islam and Muslims." Yes, misinformation campaigns do a great disservice to Muslims and Islam.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

I think we have under two minutes to go, so I'm going to again begin with the Manitoba Muslim Association and then the Newfoundland one.

What is the most important thing that we as leaders and the federal government can do to address the increased levels of hate, misinformation, and fear?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: I think it's very important to be able to deeply study these phenomena, track them, and record data. One of the challenges we have is the lack of data so that we can understand the extent of this problem and this issue.

The second thing is that communities at the grassroots level are already doing a lot. Whether they're Muslim or of some other affiliation, there's a lot of work already being done on the ground to help Canadians get to know each other better. The government can empower these communities through funding and through programs that would encourage schools, law enforcement, and social services to all partner with communities to try to create programs to facilitate Canadians in better understanding each other.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much.

I'll go on to the Newfoundland Muslim Association.

Dr. Ayse Akinturk (Executive Committee Member, Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador): Thank you very much.

Going back to the recommendations that Mr. Pirzada mentioned in his speech, I would like to emphasize four important points.

First of all, we need qualitative and quantitative data to find out what kinds of problems we are dealing with, and there are barriers that prevent the collection of such data. For instance, people don't know their rights, and they need to be educated. Sometimes they feel shy or they fear reporting the incidents. Reporting should be facilitated and encouraged, and also service providers who are dealing with such complaints should be properly educated constantly so that they know how to deal with them.

I remember the testimony of another witness. In her childhood, she experienced with her family some Islamophobic incidents, and they decided to report them, but the police forces said it was just a funny prank, so they should just take it easy and let it go.

There are so many things that should be done on many fronts, especially education and professional training of service providers in various sectors, such as the media, the school education system, health services, social work, and law enforcement.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Akinturk. I'm sorry. We've finished the seven minutes.

Now we're going to go to Scott Reid for seven minutes, for the Conservatives.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Seeing as you were in the middle of reviewing the points, do you want to finish that up?

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: Okay. You can ask your question.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, the chair stopped you because you ran out of time, but if you could finish up your points, it would be helpful.

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: I think awareness and education programs are so essential that they shouldn't be left to the discretion of individual institutions. They should be made a regular, consistent, and mandatory component of the school curriculum and of the annual training of professionals working in these different sectors. Also, we need to develop programs to support victims of Islamophobia and protect vulnerable ones who have yet to experience it.

The most important thing with these programs is that all of them have to be developed in consultation, in conversation with the grassroots organizations, because they are the representatives on the ground of potential and actual victims.

The most important thing is that we need to introduce and implement appropriate tools that will promote equity and inclusion and eliminate racial and religious barriers to employment. In that context, we know that they have a gender-based equity lens, so why not introduce an equity lens considering racial and religious minorities, the vulnerable sectors, in our budget preparations?

• (1705)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

This is for our Newfoundland witnesses again. I want to start with Mr. Pirzada and ask this question.

First of all, I want to thank you for being so positive and upbeat about Canada. I think this is the greatest country in the world, and I have had the chance to live in its two most obvious rivals, Australia and the United States. I think we are the greatest, and we get into the bad habit as Canadians of beating ourselves up over our country because it's not perfect. It isn't, but it's a pretty great place, so thank you for saying that.

In Newfoundland, I'm assuming the Muslim minority is fairly small.

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I was going to ask the number.

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: There are roughly 2,000 people, and that includes Muslim students from different parts of the world. Recently, with the influx of Syrian refugees and the families, another 200 or so have been added.

Mr. Scott Reid: Am I right that Newfoundland's experience is bit different from that of the rest of the country? I'm assuming that the Muslim community there is typically better educated than the population as a whole, because people have typically come in to get professional credentials. For some Newfoundlanders, the only Muslim they'll know is the doctor who delivered their baby. Is that a reasonable characterization?

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: That was the perception, and I think it was to some extent correct, but that has changed. Many new Syrian refugees are still struggling—once their first year is over, all the grants and everything dry up, so they are struggling. They are probably not educated as much as the other people, but they do have a lot of skills. There are technicians, mechanics, and—

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: Carpenters.

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: —carpenters, and they are opening their shops. There are some barbershops. People are realizing that these people who came have established themselves in a short time.

Mr. Scott Reid: The unemployment issue has come up twice in today's testimony. Is that looking like it's going to be a problem for the recent Syrian immigrants?

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: It is going to be a problem, definitely. I'm telling you about the Newfoundland experience. I think this is a positive experience, generally. Over the last few decades, we have taken steps to gain the trust of RCMP, the RNC, the clergy, and the political leaders. We now feel just like one family. I think that experience has to be propagated.

We know that Newfoundland most of the time is not taken seriously. I have experienced this attitude on the mainland. People think I am not a Newfoundlander, so they tell their stories about Newfoundland. That's a different thing. Indeed, I think the Newfoundland experience can be an ideal role model and that we can be of great help to the committee.

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: If you don't mind, I would like to add to the comments made by Dr. Pirzada. Unemployment is a big issue in Newfoundland. I know this from my own experience and from the experiences of my close friends. Many of them are very qualified professionals with multiple degrees, graduate degrees, double doctorates, and fluency in both official languages of Canada, and they still can't find employment. They either find themselves looking after their own families, which is an injustice to all these years of education, or moving to other provinces. Unemployment is a great problem in Newfoundland, not only generally for Newfoundlanders but particularly for the Muslim community living there.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Reid, I wonder if I could ask the Manitobans to weigh in on your question.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, that's a good idea.

The Chair: Please throw your two bits' worth in and see if Manitoba is a better province than Newfoundland.

Dr. Idris Elbakri: I think they're both great provinces, and so are the rest of the provinces and territories. Generally speaking, Canadians—and I've lived in the U.S. and Canada—have this ethic of “live and let live”, which is a wonderful way to conduct our lives. I think we are culturally influenced by our neighbours to the south, however, and some of the rhetoric there has spilled over. We see that

mostly online, but we're concerned about attempts to claim the public space as well by those who would skew these messages. I think there is still reason for concern. We cannot be complacent. We have to work hard to encourage our communities to deal with these sorts of challenges.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is that okay, or did you have something else you wanted to ask, Mr. Reid, since I stole a bit of your time there?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, that's fantastic. Thank you very much. That was helpful.

The Chair: Next is Ms. Kwan for the NDP, for seven minutes.

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

Further to the response that Ms. Akinturk provided us around the issue of unemployment and the implications for a lot of individuals who have the training and the expertise but are not landing the jobs they had hoped for. In other forums we've heard from people that discrimination and hate have implications, and sometimes lifelong implications.

To that end, for the purposes of what we're trying to achieve in this study, do you have recommendations for government on how we can address that issue?

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: I would like to start with a very general problem that concerns many Canadians who have credentials from overseas and not from Canada.

I think that the recognition of foreign credentials, international credentials, should become a much-facilitated procedure. It really takes a lot of effort and years, and in the end people give up and try to find other solutions to make a living for themselves. Recognition of international credentials, as well as making it easier to prove that you are racially or religiously discriminated against in hiring processes or work retention processes, would be a good step forward.

I don't know whether my friends have other things to add to that.

Dr. Mansoor Pirzada: From the health industry perspective, I would say that I have personally seen and experienced discrimination and racial profiling. During the training and everything, I've been called a terrorist and I've been called...so yes.

I know that there are so many medical graduates who.... I see it. I receive emails. They are overqualified. They are willing to work not even as physicians but below physician levels, as physician assistants, and even then they are not getting the jobs. Sometimes I've heard people say, “Well, he's overqualified, but at least we are getting an overqualified health practitioner or health professional and giving him a physician assistant job.”

These things are going on all over Canada. We know it. I mean, all of us are highly educated people, and we have the insight. We know what's going on. I think it's time for us to say that, yes, this is going on and we need to deal with it head-on, rather than just trying to talk, mellow it down, and say that it doesn't exist or something like that.

• (1715)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

There's a possibility that I would like to explore. In a number of different meetings, witnesses came forward to suggest that it's time for Canada to have a national strategy to address racism or a national anti-racism strategy on racism and religious discrimination. I wonder if you can shed some light on whether you think it's time for us to do that. If you say yes, how should it be resourced and how should we be working on the ground with the community in addressing this very real issue that is facing all of us today?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much for your question.

I think that not only the development but the implementation of that national strategy is the only way for us to move forward to address these outstanding issues of racial and religious discrimination and Islamophobia.

I think the strategy has to be developed and implemented in consultation with grassroots organizations, because they are at the forefront. They are familiar with the realities on the ground. On a day-to-day basis, they get complaints. They counsel those who have been victims of these scenarios, these serious situations.

Also, when we implement our strategy, we should set clear goals, clear objectives, and clear targets for how that strategy works. What are the outcomes? Are we making any progress? How is that gap, that disparity, in unemployment among visible minorities being addressed?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Recently we were talking about data collection, particularly the issue around under-reporting. I think a lot of lived experiences are in fact not reported. We heard previously from a couple of presenters about some experiences from people in the community that were never followed up. As an example, there was one particular case of a young woman who faced discrimination in her workplace. How do we go about collecting data from that perspective, when not every incident is reported to the police and thereby makes it into the data collection?

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much again for a very interesting question.

As mentioned by Dr. Pirzada, our first recommendation is to create a national registry to record all hateful incidents involving Islamophobia and other forms of racial and religious discrimination. Why are we making this recommendation? We are all professionals and we are involved to a certain extent in policy-making. Our experience is that if you want to have informed decision-making on any issue, you first need to have the information in both quantitative terms as well as qualitative terms, because that is the only way for us to move forward.

Generally, as mentioned by other witnesses, victims of these hate crimes or of discrimination on a racial or religious basis are already suffering. They have lost self-esteem. They have lost self-confidence. Then we put them through the process of going through these complaints through law enforcement agencies. It is very painful for them. It is just like putting salt on their wounds. We need to have a better informal system in the form of some sort of national

registry where they can dial in or log in and complain and record their report with all the facts and figures without going through any further harassment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

I'm going to take the prerogative of the chair and ask our Manitoba colleagues to add to your question, Ms. Kwan, on what they see as elements of a national strategy.

• (1720)

Dr. Idris Elbakri: If I understand it, the question is regarding the national strategy.

The Chair: Yes. What are the elements?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: I think a national strategy would be a welcome development. It would be a step in the right direction.

In our view it should encompass the following components: first, it should emphasize education of young children. It's remarkable that as an immigrant, I grew up in a much more homogeneous society, but my children today go to public school, to a French immersion program here in Winnipeg, and they have friends from all different walks of life. I think it's important that in schools we work with young children to instill the values of diversity and inclusiveness from an early age.

It's also important to encourage communities to share good practices. Again, I would like to come back to the point that a lot of good work is already happening at the grassroots level, but we need a platform for that to be shared and celebrated. That will empower those who may not have had those experiences yet to try to engage as well with their own communities.

The second point made by our colleagues from Newfoundland is that we have to involve the grassroots communities and consult with them, because a lot of the work is being done by them.

The other aspect that has come out of your committee's deliberation is Islamophobia. What is the definition, what is the extent of it, and so on? I think there need to be grants to academic experts in universities to study this issue further, whether it's Islamophobia or racism and discrimination in general, to inform our policy-making with scholarly research that has withstood the test of peer review and so on.

The Chair: I am sorry, but we've already ended the seven minutes, Ms. Kwan. I gave them an extra couple of seconds to comment on the elements. We have to move on to Julie Dzerowicz for the Liberals for seven minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: [*Member speaks in Arabic*]

I want to thank all of you for your wonderful presentations. My last name betrays me—or doesn't betray me, actually. My mother is Mexican, a light brown woman who came in the early seventies and experienced a lot of racism and discrimination in terms of trying to find jobs. This last name actually isn't really my last name. It was changed at the border to simplify it so that Canadians could pronounce it.

Mr. Scott Reid: This is the simplified version?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: This is the simplified version. You don't want to know what it was.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Part of my point is that systemic discrimination has existed for a while.

We've been very blessed in this country that we have new races and cultures that come through time, and you can see it. We've always had difficulty in accepting every new group. I feel wonderful that I am a part of a government that is finally starting to try to develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing and eliminating systemic racism and discrimination.

My colleague Ms. Kwan mentioned a national action strategy, and I think we're all talking about that. We've had the black community come before us, we have talked about the indigenous community, we have had the Jewish community come before us, and we've had lots of letters from Christians saying they're discriminated against.

We have to set some priorities in a national action plan, and I know that both of you have made a series of recommendations. Could tell us what we should be prioritizing? Just to give you a little context, Ontario has put an anti-racism action plan into place. They've had to set some priorities on what to begin with.

Perhaps we'll start with our Newfoundland community and then we'll go to the Manitoba community.

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: I think our last recommendation would be to focus on introducing and implementing appropriate tools that would promote equality and inclusion and eliminate racial and religious barriers to employment, because then people feel they are socially and economically empowered and their self-esteem and their resistance to attempts to be discriminated against rises.

I think this is the most important thing. This should be a priority. The other ones can come afterwards.

• (1725)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's wonderful.

Could we hear from Manitoba?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: I think the idea of collecting data or a data registry is very important.

I think maybe one or two other priorities would be working with educational institutions, with younger folks—university and high school and even earlier than that—to try to foster the salient ethic of respecting diversity and inclusion.

Another priority would be to encourage partnerships to be formed across the country between places of worship, in the schools, in law enforcement, and so on, so people can come together and tackle these issues with knowledge of their own local context, but with the support of the government.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you. That's very helpful.

You have one extra to add.

Dr. Ayse Akinturk: I related to your initial remarks, because I know many younger children and youth, including my own son... When we Muslims name our children, we try to pick beautiful names, names that have meaning, but recently I started observing a trend among Muslim youth to be shy or ashamed about their names because their peers cannot pronounce them because they're different.

As a result, their peers bully them. Their peers make fun of their names, so they choose some nicknames that are easier to pronounce so they can be accepted by their peers.

It's damaging not only to youth self-esteem, but also for all their families and communities.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Absolutely, and I know that's also very relevant in the Chinese community. I know a lot of people named Barbie, or they'll pick names because they think it's easier. I always say they should use their original name, because it's so beautiful.

That leads to my next question, which is around education. We have the second-largest country in the world, a very small population, and our provinces are very different, but we're trying to come up with a national plan. I think education might be slightly varied in the different provinces. I don't know if there are certain nuances that you think we need to think about in Newfoundland or in Manitoba.

The other aspect around education is that social media can have a very big impact in promoting hate, but also in promoting love. I wonder if there is something we need to take into account around social media.

Again, maybe we'll start with Newfoundland and then go to Manitoba.

Mr. Haseen Khan: Thank you very much for your question.

The Chair: We have only one minute, everyone, and we have to hear from Manitoba, so just remember that, please.

Mr. Haseen Khan: As I mentioned earlier, education and awareness are the most powerful tools to address any type of ignorance or misconception.

Canada is a huge country. We have many demographic and geographic challenges, and that is where these grassroots organizations come into the picture. They are familiar with the realities of the jurisdiction where they are working and they can provide a meaningful contribution.

I will go back to your earlier question about the national plan. In our opinion, I think a national plan or a national strategy, whatever name you want to use, should be based on four pillars: number one, inclusiveness and equality; number two, education and awareness; number three, support and empowerment; and number four, the information management system.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Manitoba, would you comment?

Dr. Idris Elbakri: Thank you.

I think some of the local nuances that would need to be taken into account in Manitoba are first that we have a very assertive, vibrant, and growing indigenous community in Winnipeg—an urban indigenous community—as well as on the reserves. I think those experiences have to be taken into account, and those communities have to be consulted and involved in this process.

The second is that Manitoba is also quite bilingual. Mr. Vandal represents the French-speaking neighbourhood in Winnipeg—St. Boniface. We have small towns that are francophone. I think that's an important part of our heritage, and we need to try to account for that and include that in our consideration. Also, half of the population lives in Winnipeg, but we have a large number of smaller towns and rural areas where the context and challenges may be different and the issues may be expressing themselves a bit differently.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We bring this session to a close. I want to thank our witnesses for spending time and giving us a lot to chew on.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>