

Recommendations for the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments to address Islamophobia

Background:

The tragedy that took place on June 6th 2021, when a person deliberately drove his van into members of the Afzal family, completely shook not just the London Muslim community, but the entire Canadian community. The immediate reactions were of fear, anger, and deep hurt, but the emotion of surprise was largely missing from the Muslim community. Those who have been studying and raising our voices to counter Islamophobia have been asking our public and private sectors to take this issue seriously for more than a decade with little success in getting our voices heard. It is very sad that it took the loss of four innocent lives for our government to take a serious notice of Islamophobia and call for a National Summit on Islamophobia.

The Canadian Muslim community which has been experiencing islamophobia as a daily adversity for two decades, appreciated the words of comfort and the recognition of Islamophobia by the politicians from all political parties, but insisted that the words of comfort must be followed by real actions. Only meaningful actions to counter the Islamophobia and racism can give a sense to the Canadians in general, and the Canadian Muslim community in particular, that the Afzal's family murders were not in vain.

About the organization:

The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) is a charitable organization active in Waterloo region and surrounding areas empowering women and girls to be leaders and change makers. CMW provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and leadership and skills development for Muslim women while addressing issues of gender-based violence, racism, discrimination and Islamophobia through innovative programming and services, partnerships and collaboration, and advocacy and outreach.

CMW was founded by a handful of racialized Muslim women in 2010 to address Islamophobia, particularly the gendered Islamophobia. The group came together to respond to Bill 94 in Quebec, one of the earliest manifestations of the Structural Islamophobia. As racialized Muslim women, we all shared the encounters with structural (state level), systemic (institutional level) and interpersonal (street level) and that shared lived experience motivated us to mobilize ourselves and our allies to take action against Islamophobia, gendered Islamophobia, and racism in Waterloo region very early on. Today, CMW is very well-recognized in Waterloo region for its ground-breaking work on Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia. Our "Together Against Islamophobia" traces its roots to the first of its kind "Hate Crime Project" (2012-2014) which documented hate incidents against Muslim women and released a [community report](#) with recommendations in 2014. In partnership with Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council, CMW held a community consultation on Islamophobia in 2018 and released [Islamophobia in Waterloo Region](#) report which included several recommendations for systemic changes in Waterloo region to tackle Islamophobia. Currently, CMW offers a number of programs and services to address Islamophobia in Waterloo Region and the surrounding areas including a [Hate Incidents Reporting system](#) and services and supports for the victims.

About this document:

Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) organized a community consultation in Waterloo Region for the National Action Summit on Islamophobia. All local Muslim led organisations as well as the members of the Muslim community were invited to participate. African Family Revival Organization , Mahdi Welfare Organization, Muslim Women of Cambridge, Somali Canadian Association, Women Empowerment Society, Islamic Humanitarian Services, Islamic Center of Cambridge and many community members joined the consultation.

The community consultation for the National Summit on Islamophobia was held online on Tuesday, July 6th from 6:30-8:30pm. It was attended by over 30 organizational representatives and community members. Majority of the attendees were women, a demographic which is often missed in such consultations. Black community members and youth were in attendance as well.

The discussion in the consultation was guided by the questions provided by National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM). Participants were divided into four breakout rooms with facilitators and note takers. CMW compiled the responses into one document and shared it with NCCM to add Waterloo region's voices to the NCCM's [Call to Action](#) document submitted for the National Action Summit on Islamophobia.

CMW fully endorses the recommendations made by National Council of Canadian Muslim, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Muslim Association of Canada, and those by Azeezah Kanji and Tim McSorley of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group.

The following are some key recommendations from the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW for the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments to effectively prevent and address Islamophobia at structural, systemic and interpersonal levels. CMW's grassroots level spans a decade, so the following recommendations are not exclusively from one consultation, rather from numerous community conversations, program participants' engagement , peer worker monthly sessions and CMW's various community consultations and reports including ["Islamophobia in Waterloo Region \(2018\)](#), [Huquq: Muslim Women's Human Rights Education and Awareness Program Community Report \(2020\)](#), and [Waterloo Region Muslim Women's Needs Assessment \(2021\)](#). We have also included select NCCM recommendations that we found in strong alignment with what we heard locally.

Recommendations for the Federal Level

Definition and focus:

- Define what is Islamophobia in consultation with various stakeholders.
- Adopt a definition of the term “Islamophobia” that encompasses its intersectionality with racism, xenophobia and sexism and its manifestations on structural, systemic, and interpersonal levels.
- This definition should be the one to guide discussions about what constitutes Islamophobia in Canada
- This definition should also be the one used by the state in all its business, across all of its departments.
- Consistently use the term Islamophobia when listing issues such as racism, Anti-Indigenous racism, Anti-Black racism, Anti-Semitism, and Homophobia.
- Refrain from diluting the focused work to address Islamophobia when it happens by bringing in other similar issues. Both M103 and National Action Summit on Islamophobia went ahead only with this dilution in the focus. We recognize the importance of other issues as well as how they overlap and intersect with the challenge of Islamophobia. However, the pattern of bringing in other issues when the core issue is Islamophobia is unique to state level Islamophobia discussions only which only perpetuate the very issue (Islamophobia) that these discussions are held to address.

Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents:

- Amend the criminal code for hate-motivated crimes as free-standing provisions that include specific penalties for different forms of hate crimes, including pulling off a hijab, and being threatened by dogs.
- All hate crimes as well as hate incidents should be documented throughout Canada.
- Invest in community-based reporting and documentation systems and victims supports services.
- Support the victims of hate crime by establishing a designated fund.
- Establish dedicated prosecutorial units for prosecuting hate-motivated crimes.
- Prioritize and invest in restorative justice and other diversionary measures in both hate crimes and hate incidents cases.
- Take strong action including, but not limited to, legislative measures against online expression of hate by both organized groups and private actors.
- Hold social media companies accountable for the removal of the Islamophobic content that spread hate and misinformation about Muslims.

Gendered Islamophobia:

- Attorney general should intervene in all cases challenging Quebec’s Secularism Law in courts
- Establish a fund to support all those impacted by Quebec’s Secularism Law
- Strengthen Muslim women’s voices by allocating funds for Muslim women led organizations and grassroots initiatives
- Recognize gendered Islamophobia as a form of Violence Against Women
- Recruit Muslim women, into Agencies, Boards and Commissions
- Incentivise the production of Muslim stories, told by Canadian Muslim women, through dedicated funding in the Canada Media Fund, Telefilm, the National Film Board, and provincial and municipal grants for arts and media
- Provide a dedicated fund for Social Science and Humanities Research Council to study Gendered Islamophobia and its short and long term impact on Canadian Muslim women.

Recommendations for the Provincial Level

Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents:

- Institute a provisional Hate Crimes Accountability Unit in all provinces.
- Make Hate Crimes Accountability Units responsible for providing guidance on appropriate penalties for police officers or officers who discourage reporting.
- Mandate municipalities to pass by-laws to prevent and address street harassment

Gendered islamophobia:

- Take any and all possible parliamentary actions against the Secularism Law in Quebec.
- Recruit Muslim women, into Agencies, Boards and Commissions.
- Strengthen Muslim women's voices by allocating funds for Muslim women led organizations and grassroots initiatives.
- Invest in the successful social and economic integration of Muslim women.

Human Rights commission:

- Allocate funding to ensure that human rights commission can decrease wait times, increase access, and provide needed education.
- Extend limitation periods for human rights complaints to two years.

Education:

- Revise curriculum employing an anti-islamophobia lens.
- Mandate anti-Islamophobia training for school boards, administrators, teachers and administrative staff.
- Mandate equitable employment policies to increase the representation of BIPOC communities.
- Collect and share race and faith based data on a regular bases.
- Use desegregated data to guide policies and programs development.
- Include positive stories about Islam and Muslims to counter the Islamophobic narrative.

Policing:

- Invest in upstream approaches to prevent, reduce and address criminal activity.
- Bring in civilian oversight of the police services for accountability purposes.
- Mandate Anti-Islamophobia and Cultural Sensitivity trainings at all levels.

Housing:

- Invest in affordable housing for all.
- Provide funds to the Tenant and Landlord commission to facilitate cases of discrimination.

Recommendations for Municipal Level

Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents:

- Pass municipal street harassment bylaws that are proportional and constitutional.
- Pass municipal neighbour harassment bylaws that are proportional and constitutional.
- Invest in community-based reporting and documentation of hate crimes / hate incidents.
- Provide dedicated funding for local organizations and initiatives striving to address Islamophobia.
- Invest in neighbourhood programming that focuses on bringing diverse neighbours together.

Gendered Islamophobia:

- Pass motions to denounce Quebec's Secularism Law.
- Develop models for training young Muslim women leaders for the future such as the Youth Fellowship program in Toronto.

Other:

- Dedicate specific funding for Anti-Islamophobia public awareness campaigns.
- Invest in celebrating the history of local Canadian Muslims and initiatives.