

Three Deeply Concerned Citizens

To: The Clerk of the SC, Mr. Jean-François LaFleur via email: JUST@parl.gc.ca

From: Three Deeply Concerned Individual Citizens Date:

June 21, 2024

Re: Standing Committee on Justice & Human Rights - Study of Islamophobia and Additional Measures that Could be Taken to Address the Valid Fears that are Being Expressed by Canada's Muslim Community

We write in our capacity as Canadian citizens who deeply cherish Canadian values and living in a free and democratic society. We actively support the goals of combating hate directed against **all** individuals and groups living in Canada of every race, every national or ethnic origin, every colour, every religion, every sex, and all ages, including individuals with mental and/or physical disabilities. We fully support this Committee's goals of exploring additional measures to address valid fears expressed by Canada's Muslim Community.

Our submission is focused solely on the concerning recommendation to introduce the concept of anti-Palestinian racism ("APR") as a measure to combat hate directed against individual Muslim people and adherents of Islam who are of Palestinian origin.

We are alarmed that APR is being introduced without sufficient due-diligence, study or understanding of its potential to cause grave harm to freedom of expression, open debate and to live without fear of reprisal for holding differing political views, opinions and narratives.

Recommendation:

We recommend that APR not be introduced given the great (and ironic) potential for it to be weaponized and used as a means to silence and punish anyone who disagrees with Palestinian narratives and perspectives, as many do. To suggest that someone cannot advocate different views is nothing short of an attack against the right to free speech.

In the alternative, APR must not include as part of its definition the opposition to Palestinian narratives and perspectives. To do otherwise would be to suggest that opposing views of history or historical figures and opposing views on geopolitical matters are worthy of sanction and punishment.

Definition of APR is Overly Broad and May Be Used to Punish Opposing Narratives and Perspectives

We are firm believers in a two-state solution (Israel and Palestine) and acknowledge the suffering of both Jewish and Palestinian people. In our view, section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms already includes and protects individuals of Palestinian origin who reside in Canada. It is neither wise nor necessary to introduce a newly defined class.

As we understand it, the definition of APR as set out by the Arab Canadian Lawyer Association is as follows:

Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values.

We highlighted the particularly concerning aspects of this definition.

If you review these aspects carefully you will see that the fundamental problem with this definition is that it is so broad that it may be used to punish individuals who disagree with Palestinian narratives and perspectives about historical events and geopolitical issues.

In fact, any criticism of any Palestinian narrative or perspective is captured by this definition.

In a free and democratic society individuals must be able to hold and share differing narratives and perspectives and even disagree with each other's narratives and perspectives on historical, political and geopolitical matters.

The APR definition goes well beyond ensuring equity and protecting against discrimination and harassment for a prescribed class of individuals and may be used to silence voices in opposition to a particular narrative or perspective. And, critically, who gets to decide the "correct" narrative or perspective on historical and geopolitical events with which no one may openly disagree?

The Middle East conflict is protracted and complex. It is messy. World leaders have been working for decades to try to resolve these complex issues and have yet to succeed. How is it wise or even possible for Canadian government institutions, public education administrators and teachers, and enforcement agencies to become the arbiters of what is or is not a permitted narrative or perspective on the Middle East, Jews, Muslims and Palestinians?

It is the obligation of our Canadian government and public education systems to teach and model the Canadian mosaic for our diverse citizens, residents and, in particular our students. Our students represent our future and they must be educated to be tolerant of different narratives and perspectives, not to silence and delegitimize those who hold different views and opinions on historical and geopolitical matters.

Palestinian Canadians already have two classes of discrimination that apply to them: general racism and Islamophobia. We do not have anti-Tamil racism, anti-Sikh racism, anti-Ukrainian racism, anti-Kurd racism, anti-Armenian racism, or anti-Baluch racism as separate categories for good reason - transporting geopolitical issues and national struggles occurring in other parts of the world to inform discrimination in Canada goes against the Canadian values of diversity, inclusion, dialogue, coexistence, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

The concept of anti-Palestinian racism does nothing to advance the cause of Palestinian rights or to further a two-state solution in the Arab-Israeli conflict - the official stance of the Canadian government on the Middle East. APR's characterization of any support for Israel as discrimination erases the concept of two states for two peoples. It also silences moderate Palestinian voices who want peace and coexistence with Israel, and marginalizes individuals who are currently working toward this in the Middle East and elsewhere.

In short, introducing APR could set a potentially dangerous and divisive precedent that could threaten the cohesion of Canadian society.

We thank you for your serious consideration of our submission.