



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

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CHPC • NUMBER 080 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, October 25, 2017**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Hedy Fry**



## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Wednesday, October 25, 2017

• (1535)

[English]

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee, which is an all-party committee on Canadian heritage, will be studying the issue of systemic racism and religious discrimination. I want to welcome our witnesses here. As everyone knows, we have an amended list. The other group that was supposed to be here for this first hour was not able to come, so we only have one group here for the first hour, which is the Iranian Canadian Congress.

I want to welcome you, Mr. Tabasinejad, and Ms. Ghasemi.

The usual protocol is that your group has 10 minutes in which to present to us. You can choose who takes the 10 minutes or if you want to split it. Then there will be a question-and-answer round. For the committee's own interest, so that you can make sure you're on the list, we will probably go to two full rounds because we have only one group presenting to us. The second round will be a five-minute round, and not three.

We will begin.

Which one of you will be doing the speaking?

Mr. Tabasinejad, I'll give you an eight-minute count when we get to eight minutes so that you can wrap up what you have to do. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad (Policy Chair, Iranian Canadian Congress):** Thank you so much.

Madam Chair, honourable members of the committee, I would like to thank you all for inviting us here today to discuss how our government can work to combat racism and discrimination and create a more inclusive Canada.

The Iranian Canadian Congress, or ICC, is a grassroots, non-partisan, non-religious community organization that seeks to safeguard and advance the interests of Canadians of Iranian descent, a population estimated at 300,000 nationwide. The ICC is the main advocacy organization for the Iranian-Canadian community, one of the largest and fastest-growing immigrant communities in Canada, and this has been corroborated by the latest census data just released this week.

Though Canada has been rightly recognized for its effectiveness in integrating minority communities, we believe that there's still

much room for improvement, and hopefully this study will guide Canadians and our government in moving forward.

Our organization recently completed a survey of more than 600 Iranian Canadians on the issue of racism and discrimination, a survey that will inform much of our testimony here today. The results of this survey, in addition to individual reports we receive on a regular basis, show that Iranian Canadians are subjected to a significant degree of racism and discrimination.

A majority, over 60%, of our respondents in this survey expressed that they have experienced racism and discrimination in Canada. Employment discrimination, social discrimination, and discrimination by airline or airport security have been the three leading fields selected by respondents who have experienced racism or discrimination, with more than a half of respondents reporting employment discrimination specifically.

The respondents identified anti-Iranian sentiment, Islamophobia, and general xenophobia as the three main causes behind the racism and discrimination that they have experienced, with anti-Iranian sentiment leading. Close to 50% of respondents asserted that they have experienced specifically anti-Iranian sentiment.

Finally, a significant majority, 77%, of our respondents saw the policies and rhetoric directed against Iran on the international stage as a significant factor in the discrimination and racism that they feel in their daily lives in Canada.

Obviously these findings are extremely concerning for us and point to a need for action on behalf of government in close coordination with civil society.

A recent report published by Statistics Canada shows that the group known as West Asians and Arabs, a group under which Canadians of Iranian heritage are included, experienced growing discrimination in Canada. Between 2013 and 2015, police reported that crimes motivated by hatred of West Asian or Arab populations increased by 92%. Violent crimes targeting West Asian or Arab populations, which again include people of Iranian descent, increased 52% in 2015, the highest rise among all visible minority groups.

Unfortunately, we have seen numerous examples of how those of Iranian background are specifically targeted for racial attacks. Recently in the United States, two Indian Americans were shot by a white supremacist in Kansas because they were perceived to be Iranians.

In Canada, an Iranian Ph.D. student at Western University was brutally attacked and told to go back to his country, and a couple of months ago an Iranian-Canadian cab driver was verbally harassed by a customer who made explicit reference to his nationality.

These are a few instances of individuals of Iranian heritage being specifically targeted for racial violence in a manner that is unacceptable in a multicultural society. As I mentioned, our survey results show that the discrimination and racism that Iranian Canadians face not only has roots in Islamophobia and xenophobia but also results from a specifically anti-Iranian sentiment that is informed by Iran's treatment on the international stage.

Perhaps the most important instance of systematic discrimination affecting all Iranians today, including Canadians of Iranian heritage, is President Donald Trump's travel ban. With the imposition of these discriminatory travel restrictions, many Canadians of Iranian origin and thousands of Iranian citizens living in Canada who had to travel to the United States for business or education or to visit family were left in uncertain and insecure positions. Even now, as the ban has gone through several iterations and legal battles, their fate at the border is uncertain. Many members of our community have pointed to increased scrutiny by border security since the ban and have expressed feeling insecure at the prospect of travelling to the United States. This discriminatory policy has caused extreme anxiety and concern in our community, and we believe it is our government's duty to protect its citizens from such blatant discrimination by our closest neighbour at the border.

Unfortunately, systemic discrimination not only exists at our borders, but within them as well. Much of this systemic discrimination is a result of Canada's Iran policy and Canada's sanctions regime on Iran, which began in 2012, the same year that the Canadian government broke off relations with Iran and closed embassies in both countries.

• (1540)

Not only have sanctions deprived many honest and hard-working Iranian-Canadian entrepreneurs and business people of their livelihoods, but they have also had disastrous affects on ordinary Iranian Canadians. Financial institutions have been particularly guilty of discrimination against these ordinary members of our community.

Since 2012, as a result of strict sanctions placed on Iran by the Canadian government, banks have refused to deal with those who had or were perceived to have any financial links to Iran, whether personal or business. This resulted in the closure of the bank accounts of Iranian Canadians, including Canadian citizens, for no other reason than because they were Iranian. For example, the bank account of an Iranian engineering student in Quebec was closed with only \$700 in the account. When he approached the bank he was only told that his account was closed because he had an Iranian passport.

Even today, after the government eased some of its sanctions on Iran in February 2016, financial institutions are still applying the same discriminatory rules, and we have received several reports from ordinary Iranian Canadians who have been subject to discrimination by banks.

We have also received several reports that Iranian Canadians are being discriminated against by employers explicitly because of their Iranian nationality. Iranian Canadians are denied employment in companies where they need to have access to sensitive technologies, are involved in defence contracts, or whose work requires them to travel to the United States. This is especially the case in engineering professions, where much of our community is employed.

Now my colleague, Soudeh Ghasemi, will go over some of our recommendations.

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi (Vice-President, Iranian Canadian Congress):** Thank you, Pouyan.

First, we believe that a systematic review of our Criminal Code legislation in regard to hate crimes and hate speech is long overdue. Numerous sources have reported that a significant part of the problem in prosecuting hate crimes is that the Criminal Code limits what can be done and does not allow speedy and efficient prosecution.

Second, we recommend that a racism and discrimination hotline be set up to allow victims of discrimination access to counsel and allow government to collect information on these incidents.

Third, current government Bill C-51 is removing parts of the Criminal Code that provide protection to places of worship, religious ceremonies, and faith communities. At this time, when hate crime against people from specific religious backgrounds is rising, we believe these protections are necessary. We recommend this committee to propose in its study for the government and Parliament to amend this part of Bill C-51.

Fourth, we recommend that the federal government increase the budget of Canadian Heritage programs that support the initiatives of diverse community organizations dedicated to improving interfaith and intercultural understanding, and target these programs at impacted groups.

Because of the sizable population of Iranian Canadians and the significant number of new immigrants arriving from Iran, we also recommend that Statistics Canada add an Iranian category in their visible minority section for accurate hate crime data.

Finally, and most importantly, we believe Canada should, in all foreign policy decisions and statements concerning a country, explicitly take into account the effect that such decisions will have on all Canadian individuals who come from or have ties with that country. The present lack of this awareness in our foreign policy circles has caused great harm to our community.

As shown by both our examples and our survey findings, Iranian Canadians suffer from sanctions and banking discrimination, the lack of an embassy through which they can access consular services, and the constant singling out of Iran in the rhetoric and policy of countries such as Canada. They must recognize that in an increasingly globalized world, Canada's actions and words on the world stage are not limited to international relations but also affect its citizens here at home.

In fact, this is something we already recognize in regard to the treatment of certain countries on the world stage. We cannot single out a country for special negative treatment and expect that such singling out will not have negative repercussions for those who are connected or perceived as connected to that country.

What we have shown in our presentation is that Iranian Canadians face serious discrimination. This situation must be addressed by our government. It is our hope that the recommendations we presented will not only allow our community to live peacefully and as equals in Canada, but help other communities do so as well.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go to the question-and-answer period. We begin with Anju Dhillon for the Liberals, for seven minutes.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Thank you so much for coming in and testifying before our committee.

Could you please tell us how your organization has taken steps to fight against discrimination? What have you done?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Our organization is an advocacy organization. We're not a service provider. We help our community members connect with service providers in some instances, but our main role is to provide advocacy to the government. We've presented in the Senate before. We've presented petitions that were important to our community, and we've tried to express the views and concerns of our community to any meeting that we have with politicians. We try to establish as many connections with politicians as possible so that we can express the concerns and issues of our community appropriately.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** What kind of guidance do you give to those who approach your organization, because you said you connect them with services? What kinds of services do you mean?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** We have lists and connections with all of these service providers, but really that's not our main role. I didn't want to give that impression.

We do this sometimes, but there are plenty of great service providers in our community, and we do not consider ourselves a service provider in that sense. We are a political advocacy organization; that is the main service we provide to our community.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** I'm asking because the Human Rights Tribunal is available to help those who face difficulty, especially when it comes to employment discrimination. They have a lot of files before them regarding employment discrimination, so that's why I wanted to know if you were guiding people there. In the last few days we've heard testimony making it clear that people are unaware of their rights, or they're scared to get help because they think there are going to be repercussions from the authorities. This is

especially true in the immigrant population. That was the reason for my question.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Would you like me to answer that?

Basically, you're completely right. When it comes to explicit, verifiable, recorded instances of employment discrimination or other kinds of discrimination, we do try to direct our community toward the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal or to whatever is available wherever else they may reside. However, you pointed to a very important issue, which is the fear that exists. As well, frankly, people often don't have the time. We do have some individuals, especially in regard to the banking issue, who are willing to put their names on the record and take the time to go that way, and we're helping them along with that process.

Generally, we believe the most effective way of addressing this issue is to do it through government policy, etc., but of course we try as much as we can to direct individuals to the appropriate tribunals.

• (1550)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** What kind of policies would you like to see the government come up with?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** We've described some of the policy in the recommendations. Maybe Soudeh wants to go into them, but basically—

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** Yes, I can provide more details.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** First of all, we think that a review of our Criminal Code legislation is extremely important. I'm sure you've heard that in this committee from other witnesses as well. A lot of experts, legal or otherwise, have pointed to this idea.

It is very difficult in Canada to prosecute hate crimes and hate speech in an efficient manner. I believe there have only been a handful of prosecutions since the 1970s. We believe that speaks for itself. Obviously other issues are important as well, but we think this is a fundamental one that really needs to be addressed.

One thing that through our preliminary research we think would be good is if Canada looked at other countries and what their policies are. Some of what we've seen, at least at this preliminary level, is that the U.K. might be a good example in this case. It really varies, but there are very clearly cases in which an individual was very speedily, immediately, and efficiently prosecuted for a hate crime. There was a recent case in which a solicitor, I believe, a lawyer, was verbally racially harassing a woman and her daughter on the train, and almost immediately afterwards he was prosecuted, I believe, and he had to pay a pretty hefty fine. I think it was one thousand pounds. I don't know how much that is in dollars, but I think it's more than \$2,000.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** You mentioned changing the Criminal Code, amending it. What kind of legislation would you like to see, exactly?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I think the real specifics would be best left up to the legal experts, but I think on a higher level we really need to make sure that a hate crime can be prosecuted in Canada, that it is actually in our Criminal Code and is very directly addressed. It's very difficult for anyone to be charged with a hate crime at the moment. I believe it has to go through the Attorney General, and there's a very long process right now that's just not feasible.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** This question is for both of you.

You spoke a lot about employment discrimination. Could you go into a little more detail about that?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I'll start if you want.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Either one of you would be fine.

• (1555)

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Employment discrimination, unfortunately, is something that affects every immigrant community to some extent. This is more of a provincial issue, and we've been rather active on this at the provincial level.

In respect of employment discrimination, what tends to happen a lot of the time is that we invite individuals to come to our country to work in specified fields where we've identified a labour shortage. Unfortunately, once they get here, they're faced with a number of barriers to their employment. These barriers could be institutional, as when their degrees are not recognized, especially in the regulated professions. There are other issues, however, that are not as explicit. Here we're talking about the issue of Canadian experience. Individuals come here and can't get a job unless they have so-called Canadian experience, North American experience, and this is a problem.

On top of that, you have actual racial discrimination, which can happen in an interview. I believe there was a study done by the University of Toronto and Ryerson University in which they showed that if you had a non-Anglo or non-French name, you'd be far less likely to get a callback on your resumé. They sent in identical resumé and they found that the same resumé with a non-English name would have a far lower chance of getting a callback.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Would you be able to submit the study you just mentioned?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Sure. That study is fairly well known.

In our community, employment discrimination is something we've addressed in our presentation. I believe the federal government could address the fact that individuals from Iran are prevented from getting into certain jobs, either because the jobs require travel to the United States or because the job requires access to certain sensitive information that Iranian Canadians are not allowed to see. This is done especially by engineering companies, and we've heard this multiple times.

If the clerk would ask me about that study, we would love to connect you.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Yes, please. I think the more facts and the more data we have, the better picture we'll have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

I now go to the second group, and that's the Conservatives.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to encourage the witnesses to formally submit the study of which you speak. We can only look at material that has been submitted to us as testimony, so a written report would be necessary.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Then you need the Ryerson University and the University of Toronto study?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Yes, if that's the one you were referring to.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Yes, that was in response to the question.

**The Chair:** He said he was going to get it.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you.

I should tell you that I spent eight years chairing our international human rights subcommittee here on Parliament Hill. As you know, Iran has a very bad human rights record. I've always made a point of stressing that you can't blame the expatriates of a country, including those who hold dual citizenship, for the behaviour of the regime of the country they come from. As an example, I've pointed out that it's inappropriate to hold Chinese Canadians in any way morally responsible for the record of the People's Republic of China vis-à-vis its Muslim Uyghur minority, which it treats terribly.

Earlier this year, you used a term in a letter you wrote to the *Toronto Sun*, "Islamophobia", and you talked about "Iranophobia", using those two words side by side. I notice that today you didn't use the word "Iranophobia". Instead you used "anti-Iranian sentiment". I want to ask you a bit about this. This question, by the way, relates to the fact that in Iran we've seen Baha'is accused of Islamophobia and Iranophobia. That's the reason I ask that question.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Sorry. I didn't quite understand what the question was.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** You used the words "Iranophobia" and "Islamophobia" side by side. I noticed now you're not using the term "Iranophobia". You're saying "anti-Iranian sentiment" instead.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** The question is why...?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Yes, why did you make that change?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I don't think it's a change; I would say it's more of a stylistic issue. I remember it was used in a very small column. I don't think there's a lot of meaning behind the difference. "Iranophobia" has been used by some, I believe by one scholar, and it has been used before. I'm not married to it—we can change it to "anti-Iranian sentiment" if that helps.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It could be “discrimination against Iranians” or—

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Yes. Really what we're getting at and what I would be getting at with that column—and I don't know if this is still part of the testimony that we've had—what we've tried to come across with here is that the reason we even have a term for “anti-Iranian sentiment” is that we have real empirical information and observations that show that you can't merely...

Iranians, obviously, are subject to Islamophobia, but there's another trait that is specific to Iranians. It's very specific. Again I would remind you that around half of the individuals whom we surveyed said there's specifically anti-Iranian discrimination against them. That's really what I would say: that we need to tease this out.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I think I'm right in saying this, but you can correct me.

The problem is that the people who are expressing anti-Iranian discrimination, in some cases—the case you cited in your article was actually a case of murderous violence in Kansas—are conflating the individuals and the current regime. Some Iranian Canadians, I assume, support the regime and some don't, but it's not universal. Is that conflation at the root of the problem?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I would say it's definitely part of the problem. It would be wrong for us to look at all Americans and paint them with the same brush as we would paint, for example, the president of that country at the moment. I agree that's part of the issue, but another important part of the issue is that Iran is actually being singled out.

We're not saying that Iran is perfect. It obviously has problems, but compared to some of our allies in other countries that we don't speak about really, there's no real data that suggests that Iran is necessarily acting any differently. What we're saying is that while conflation is an issue, there's also the issue of singling Iran out. Because Iranians almost all come from Iran and have connections with Iran, that singling out of Iran as a country actually affects the discrimination Iranian Canadians and the Iranian diaspora feel generally.

This is an argument that was made by Adam Weinstein, a writer in the United States. He said that the Jewish diaspora and the Iranian diaspora are similar in that sense, and the connection between the Jewish diaspora and Israel, the connection between the singling out of Israel and anti-Semitism, is very similar to the singling out of Iran and anti-Iranian sentiment. I hope that answers your questions.

• (1600)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Yes. In the movie *Casablanca*, at one point one of the characters, who has links to all the resistance figures in Europe, is asked if he knows the leaders of the resistance in Prague and Paris and so on, and he says, “Yes, and in Berlin too”, so at the height of World War II, when that movie was made, we were able to distinguish between Germans and Nazis. While I would never compare any regime in the world to the Nazis, all regimes have their problems, and in the case of the Iranian regime, it sounds to me as if some people are having trouble distinguishing Iranian Canadians from supporters of the regime, let alone activists for it. Would that be essentially right?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Well, I mean, again I would say that this is one part of the issue, but the other part is that we do actually

have an issue with the singling out of Iran specifically. Every country has its problems, as you said, and every regime has its problems, but the singling out of the country of Iran for its behaviour—behaviour that is not really empirically different from any other country, either within the region or otherwise, with which we have even very friendly relations—is an additional problem. The conflation is one, and then the singling out of Iran specifically is another, and yes, that would be my argument.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I've used up all my time, so thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I'm going to give you a little extra time, if you wish. You can have another minute.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Oh, thank you.

In that case, let me deal very specifically with the concern I have regarding the Baha'i.

As you know, in Iran the constitution protects the Christian and Jewish minorities, and also Zoroastrians, but not the Baha'i. Of course Iran was the home of the Baha'i originally. In going through the Internet in preparation for today's hearings, I ran into a number of references to the accusation being made that the Baha'i, as an organization, are trying to promote Islamophobia and Iranophobia. That was the reason for asking about that language. The point I was trying to make was that I think there's a danger with those terms for that reason.

I would like your comment, if you have anything on it.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I'll be frank with you; I spend most of my time in Canada. I tangentially know about the Baha'i situation, but I can't really speak on it. As far as the connection with Iranophobia is concerned, I really don't have the expertise, unfortunately. I've been here since I was a child, so it's very difficult for me to speak on that issue. I hope you can accept that answer.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Of course I can, and thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I go to Jenny Kwan for the NDP for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to both of you for your presentations.

You spoke a little about under-reporting. Part of the work we're trying to do is to see how we can collect the data. Often the data is only collected if it's officially reported to the police, and then it becomes part of the statistics. We've also heard from many witnesses that's not the reality, and we just heard that from you as well. I wonder, to that end, how can we address this issue of under-reporting so that we can collect the real information, the real impact, of discrimination, both on the basis of race and on religious beliefs.

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** Based on the experience that we've had in the Iranian Canadian Congress for the past few years, the issue with the reporting.... I'm going to start with the banking issue.

Usually we see that people are not comfortable reaching out to officials. That's why they reach out to us first, to consult and get information about that. I'm going to speak based on my own experience.

TD closed my bank accounts and my parents' bank accounts for absolutely no reason, other than we had Iranian names. I was comfortable about speaking out against it. However, I tried to get legal counsel and I noticed that no official legal action could be taken at the time. Even though I took the case to the media, at the end of the day the issue was not resolved. I did not see any governing body overseeing the bank's appropriate.... I'm just telling you this as the story of an individual.

The cases we see in banking nowadays involve a lack of knowledge, as well as fear of reporting. That's why we think that if the government created a hotline for these cases, maybe those hotlines would be able to give more specific information as to how these cases can be elaborated or resolved, or if any action needs to be taken, they can just divert the individuals to appropriate bodies.

With regard to reporting hate-crime cases, I totally agree with you. Technically, based on the reports that were received, if anyone goes to the police, I believe the police do not open a case for that report unless it's an actual threat or a death threat to the individual. If it's not a death threat, it will never be reported and drafted somewhere.

If the government could prepare a hotline for individuals so that they feel they can reach out to those hotlines to report their issues and get consultation, I believe this step could be an opening for these situations as such.

• (1605)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you for that.

Some of the witnesses who came before us also suggested working collaboratively with NGOs and community groups that are close to particular groups. For example, you indicated you have done surveys. Would you support working with NGOs in the community to collect the data? Would your organization be willing to participate in such a program?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** We listened to the testimony and we think that's an interesting idea. Part of the problem we have is it would be very difficult to coordinate something like this among all our organizations, if it comes to the actual reporting and having people report an emergency.

That said, our answer would be a hotline. We think that might be a little bit stronger. Obviously, there would be some collaboration. Maybe if an individual is not willing or able to reach the hotline or go to this centralized reporting mechanism, then definitely NGOs would have a role to play. No matter what, we would be willing to be a part of any program that seeks to address this issue.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That brings me to my next question.

I think having it across the nation—a nationwide national strategy, if you will—would be key. We used to have a national action plan against racism. We don't anymore, and so groups have called for a

reinstatement, a refreshing, if you will, of such a plan, with accountability measures and resources built into it.

I want quick thoughts on that from both of you.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Sorry, the question was...?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** A national action plan against—

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** A national action plan, yes, we definitely think it's an important issue, especially in terms of what can be done federally. Again, we think that looking at the federal legislation we have is an important part of this. Definitely, we agree that there should be an integrated national plan. We don't want to see something that is more prominent in certain provinces or regions. We think this is an issue across the country that should be addressed on the national level.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** It brings me to the next question in terms of a national strategy. Should government adopt a race equity lens in the development of government legislation, laws, and policies?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I would say that would definitely be a great step to take. There needs to be a change in the mentalities and the approaches we have in government. We need to accept that systems of privilege and underprivilege are at play here, and an equity lens would definitely help dismantle and alleviate some of these issues.

• (1610)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm very disturbed to hear about your experience, and I guess other people in your community have had their bank accounts closed for no reason other than their nationality. It seems to me that there is very little recourse with respect to that, so to that end, the last I checked, we do have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the last I checked, such behaviour is not in compliance.

What do you think should be done? What should government do about something like that, in very practical terms on the ground?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** The government needs to communicate to the banks that this is an unacceptable thing to do. At the moment, as you said, there's very little that anybody can do, and we're getting to the point where every day we hear that a new bank is engaging in these practices. Earlier it was one or two, then four, and it keeps increasing.

We're in a dangerous position. There is a real possibility that our entire community will be de-banked and will be unable to access these banking services. In terms of specifics, I think it would have to be an overhaul of how we regulate the financial industry to make sure that individuals have access to banking regardless of their nationality, regardless of their race, and regardless of what's happening. Unfortunately, we don't have the ability to do that right now.



**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The regulatory body for financial institutions

**The Chair:** Sorry.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Did I get an extra minute?

**The Chair:** You got your extra minute, yes.

We go now to Arif Virani for the Liberals.

I guess you get an extra minute as well. We've got time to play with now.

**Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much.

*Salaam.* It is good to see you guys here, and thank you for your comments and for your responses thus far. I want to ask you maybe three to four questions in these seven or eight minutes.

You outlined a number of different aspects of the concerns you're facing. One that you highlighted was employment. What we've done as a government thus far is implement a couple of things that I think are on the right path. One is foreign credential recognition. We put \$27.5 million into that program over the next five years, and that's in an effort to ensure people's credentials are recognized. Another is that we've launched a name-blind pilot project that dovetails exactly with what you were referencing about people who lack an Anglo-Saxon name or a common name in Canada and are subconsciously discriminated against and not able to access an interview.

Could you share your thoughts with us on those two programs and on any other creative ideas you have about addressing this employment piece in particular?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** That's something that needs to happen. This is especially true for our community. There is a real issue with the regulatory bodies themselves. These are often organized provincially.

For example, in Ontario we've had a lot of problems with the dentistry organization. There seem to be a lot of artificial barriers erected for individuals who receive their education outside Canada and are trying to enter dentistry in Canada. There are similar organizations, such as the college of physicians, and so on. This really needs to happen. The government needs to step in and address what's happening on the ground and communicate to these regulatory bodies that this is not acceptable and that they need to change their policies.

With regard to Iranians and specifically some of the employment issues we've dealt with, this actually dovetails with the banking issue in terms of what we can do. We believe a big part of why Iranians are not let into some of these fields, especially the engineering field in so-called sensitive areas, and the reason we face banking issues as well, is the sanctions on Iran. We believe it creates a distrust of Iranians, and even legal issues, if an individual has worked for an Iranian company that could be on the sanctions list or whatever. Definitely this affects the banking issues. Banks are rejecting Iranians because they look at Canada's sanction laws and say, "Okay, Canada has sanctions on Iran; therefore, we don't want to touch Iranians."

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Let's go to the next area, because I want to explore this. It dovetails a bit with what Ms. Kwan was asking about.

We've heard a lot of testimony from different witnesses about this race-based equity tool, or race-based lens. It's patterned on the gender-based analysis that we've already implemented as a government, which is a step in the right direction. This tool would allow various government policies, regardless of which department they come from, to be analyzed in terms of their impact. That is something you raised in your submissions, that the impact of certain actions on the people who are here in the country needs to be understood.

Is that the type of mechanism that you think should be applied, and would it help alleviate the situation of policies that started with the previous government in 2012 unwittingly having impacts upon the diaspora population here?

• (1615)

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Definitely. It definitely goes along with the text of motion M-103, which actually advocates an all-of-government approach. We think all government policy should be looked at in terms of how it especially affects disadvantaged or marginalized or new communities in Canada.

We saw our community ignored in the foreign policy area. This is becoming more and more important as we have immigrant communities with transnational lives. Borders don't exist in the way they used to. An individual can live in Canada but keep a lot of connections with their home, so it really affects their quality of life and the quality of life of that community if foreign relations and foreign policy are determined without even thinking about how it affects them on the ground.

We definitely think it's very important to look at all our policies, not just employment. Employment is very important and education is very important, and not just education and employment in domestic policies, but also foreign policies. How do our rhetoric and our policies against, or for, a certain country affect how the individuals from a diaspora of that country live, and what their experiences are here and what their quality of life is here?

**Mr. Arif Virani:** In your opening submission, you referred to interfaith dialogue. You've cited the stats. We've heard the stats over and over again from different entities, whether they're governmental entities, NGOs, or civil society groups, talking about hate crimes being on the rise, specifically against Jews and Muslims, which demonstrates to me that we have discrimination occurring. We still have division and hatred, but we have a particular problem with religious discrimination, so the interfaith notion is appealing.

You mention that you want to see the Department of Canadian Heritage supporting that. I'd ask you to develop that idea a bit. I also want to segue and ask you if there is room for other supports, because we've also heard about the collapsing of multiculturalism in the budget. There was a time with multiculturalism programming when monies were available to support communities unto themselves. What I mean by that is just supporting the Iranian-Canadian community unto itself. Right now, we just have the ability to support Iranian Canadians doing a joint program in North York with the Korean community, for example, which is great and important, but we don't have the ability to empower Iranians to develop their own capacity and to be that conduit and have the trust of the community to receive information about hatred, discrimination, and so on.

Can you talk about the interfaith approach, but also about the approach of just supporting a community unto itself and whether you think that should be a priority?

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** I want to add that if Iranian Canadians are going to be considered a visible minority officially, if they're going to be grouped as a visible minority, then that would be a path to address some of the issues that you mentioned in terms of equity and all of that. As well, funding, obviously, will be very helpful, but if it's recognized as a visible minority, then we can address those issues.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I agree with my colleague. Also, in terms of interfaith dialogue, it's very important, especially now that we're seeing, unfortunately, a lot of discrimination against certain religious groups. You mentioned the Jewish faith and the Muslim faith, but we also see it with regard to Sikhism, etc. Understanding is a huge part of this issue. A lot of faiths have this very much in common. We need to address this and showcase this issue.

I really agree with what you meant. This is really a part of our recommendations in terms of a targeted approach for community organizations, while recognizing that there are differences in the experiences. I believe that's really what we're talking about. We have to recognize that a certain community within a certain time may be going through something that requires more resources and more attention.

**The Chair:** If we can wrap this up....

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Sure.

Efficiency is a big part of it. We need to direct the funding and the attention to the impacted communities. We need to recognize impacted communities and have the ability to identify impacted communities, like the Iranian-Canadian community.

Maybe in the future the Iranian-Canadian community won't be as targeted, hopefully, as they are now. We need to recognize impacted communities and really target the funding, and make sure that it's efficient. .

Thank you.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to the second round. I think I'm going to have to pull that down to a three-minute round, because a five-minute one will give us 25 minutes and put us over.

We're going to go to a three-minute round.

We'll go to Mr. Sweet for the Conservatives.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to express my deep concern and regret for the treatment of the members in your community who have experienced discrimination or hatred. I think there's a lot of agreement at this table from all sides that our pursuit is to have every Canadian live a life that's free of any kind of discrimination, hatred, persecution, or unequal treatment, for that matter, vis-à-vis some of the things you were talking about with regard to the CVs or resumé of people with Iranian or Persian names.

By the way, I have a lot of Iranian friends, and they prefer to be called Persians. I'm not certain how that goes, if that's a broad spectrum of the community or not, but anyway, they've kind of trained me like that.

The one problematic thing for us is the word Islamophobia, and it's not just problematic for us. About 30% of the witnesses have a problem with it. For me, the most important ones are the ones who come from the Muslim community themselves and who have an issue with it. There were quotes about how the definition has been hijacked and is irrecoverable.

As far as any kind of hatred or racism goes, we want to fight that. We want to be clear on it so that no one can co-opt a word and have it mean something else.

I want to go back to one of the things you were mentioning about Iran. I've been on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for the better part of a dozen years now, and it's been the Iranian community in Canada that have come to us and asked us to defend their family members and friends in Iran. We've always been careful, as Mr. Reid said, to point out that the regime, the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij, the mullahs that run it, are the ones we're targeting. These are people, this regime, who kill their own people. Their reputation is very bad. It's at the top echelon of all human rights offenders, but we call out the others pretty equally on the subcommittee.

We do have an Iran Accountability Week, and I certainly hope that no one ever misconstrues that as anything against a Canadian citizen of Iranian descent, Persian descent, at all. What we'd like to do is see every person in Iran free, and hopefully we'll see a democratic nation one day there in Iran. I want to be clear on that.

The other problem that has arisen from—

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet, you've gone over three minutes. Are you going to ask your question? You can make a statement. You don't have to ask a question if you don't want to.

**Mr. David Sweet:** The motion refers to racism as well as religious persecution. Do you get different input from people in your community if they have different backgrounds as far as religion is concerned? I know that there will be Muslim Iranians. There will be Iranians with Baha'i backgrounds. There will be Iranians who are secular. There will be Zoroastrian, Ahmadiyyan. Are you getting any kind of different report about levels of persecution based on their religious backgrounds as well as race?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I'll try to answer.

**The Chair:** Sorry, but you have about 30 seconds to answer it, please.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** There was a lot covered in that.

Firstly, we agree that the term "Islamophobia" is useful, whether or not what it means gets a little abstract. In terms of Iran, you mentioned human rights. Every country has its problems. Mr. Reid put it very well. Regardless of what the actual intent is behind this kind of Iran accountability and this kind of stuff, we see that it affects the discrimination that Iranian Canadians feel, which is problematic. This is something that they've reported to us. I think 77% percent said the way Iran is treated by Canada and other countries actually affects the discrimination they face.

Again, I would say that if you really look at the human rights of Iran and the reason we're saying it's being singled out, it's really not that much.... Really it's on the same level as countries like Saudi Arabia and others, or even better. The issue that we're seeing is that Iran is being singled out. We're not saying that Iran is perfect, but really the issue is the singling out of Iran for doing the same things as other countries.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Tabasinejad. We've really gone over time on this one.

We have Julie Dzerowicz for three minutes.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you so much for your presentations, and thanks so much for your patience in answering all of our questions.

I'm very big into data gathering. You had mentioned initially that there's discrimination against the Iranian community in Canada. Where do you get your data? Are you personally getting it from other people? Do you tap into police organizations? How is that you're actually gathering the data?

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** The data that we have, and what we're talking about right now, is based on the survey that we initiated recently. The survey was not going around for that long. It's been less than a week. We had more than 600 responses.

We collected these data from the community members, and some of the comments that we're making are the comments that the community members are mentioning, especially in terms of employment. We have seen in many of the comments people make that they've been discriminated against in employment situations as a result of travel bans because employers perceive that they cannot travel to the U.S. They couldn't get training or promotions because the employer perceived them as such. There wasn't enough clarification from the government and they were treated as such.

This is the data that we collected in a short period of time with minimal financial resources. It's the research that the organization has. Obviously, if we had more funding available and more resources available, we could have reached out to a greater portion of our community to be able to get more accurate data and statistical data from our community.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Ideally we would have more national statistics and a very consistent way of gathering the data.

One of your recommendations is very much about putting more money into intercultural dialogue. I know there has been a bit of a conversation around that. Is there a program about which you could say, "Here is an intercultural dialogue or program that works really well that we think we need to model or continue to introduce across the country"? Is there something that you can talk to us about that works, that you are particularly fond of or think is an excellent program?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I'll be honest with you: I'm not that familiar. Maybe Soudeh can answer. You're talking about other countries and their models, if I'm understanding you correctly.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** No, I mean just here in Canada. Is there anything that happens here in Canada that you think is done well in terms of an intercultural dialogue?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Do you mean in terms of non-governmental organizations and what they're doing?

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Sure, or even if a government is funding something. I mean anything that you think is actually working. You said, "Let's put more money into it," so there must be some program that you think might be a good one or something that you think we should model.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I think part of the issue right now is that the funding is very low. I believe it's at about \$5 million or less that's dedicated to this kind of work, which we think is not enough. Unfortunately, that means there are probably not a lot of positive examples we can look at.

I would say the government needs to do a study on what we can do, look at other models, look at what's going on, but really the funding is fundamental. I mean, it's \$5 million for a country like Canada, where we have so many immigrants and so much of our population is foreign-born. I think it really needs some real study and funding.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's about it.

We go to David Anderson, for the Conservatives.

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

Does your council express an opinion on minority rights in Iran? Do you deal with that? The reason I'm asking this is that part of our motion deals with religious discrimination. I'm simply wondering how you deal with that issue.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Our policy is that we are an Iranian-Canadian organization. We deal with Canadian politics. A lot of us, including me, are not in Iran. I haven't spent a lot of time there.

**Mr. David Anderson:** But you make other comments about Iranian issues that aren't strictly Canadian, and lots of them.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** When it comes to it, our interests are for Iranian Canadians and their experiences. When an Iranian Canadian goes to Iran and is arrested, for whatever reason, we're very active in advocating on behalf of those individuals.

In terms of getting into the politics of what's happening in Iran, etc., that's something we haven't—

• (1630)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'm surprised, because such a large number of your people have come here to get away from the rapes, the tortures, the killings, the mass arrests, the jailing of opposition leaders, the killing of journalists, and those kinds of things. It would seem that if you're representing them and you're the main voice in Canada, you would be speaking out about those things. Don't people still have relatives back home who are impacted by these things?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** In terms of people's individual experiences, to be honest, that's not something we've come across.

Really what we're looking at is the different generations of Iranian Canadians and Iranian immigrants. In the case of the original Iranian immigrants, the first wave, you're completely right. A lot of those individuals' experience with Iran and their immigrant experience was one of leaving from a kind of revolutionary stage. Then the Iran-Iraq war happened shortly after that. It was a very violent movement.

Now, the orientation of a lot of the Iranian Canadians we're seeing—I would say definitely the majority, and we've done studies on what's important to them and what they want—is really not about what happened seven years ago in Iran, or even 40 years ago, in terms of these violations you were speaking of. They're talking about wanting to prevent war with Iran, and they want to prevent sanctions on Iran because—

**Mr. David Anderson:** Can I say I'm a bit surprised, though? Even those of us who have been here for a couple of generations still feel a tie back to our country. When you have things like a UN General Assembly motion that says they have serious concern about Iran's high rate of executions without legal standards, ongoing use of torture, widespread arbitrary detention, sharp limits on freedom of assembly, expression, religious belief, and discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities, I guess I'm surprised you don't take a position on that, and that you're not actively advocating for better consequences there.

That's in the context of our debate here.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I understand.

**Mr. David Anderson:** We would like some help from you on how we deal with making sure those kinds of things do not become a factor in Canada.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I understand what you're saying, but first you should know there are a lot of organizations, Iranian and otherwise, that deal with those issues. Our organization's focus is on Iranian Canadians' lives here in Canada. We are a diaspora. We are immigrants. We are Canadians, really. We're no longer in Iran. We

have connections with Iran, and most Iranian Canadians, I would say, now have an opinion on Iran. It's more about we don't want our country to be attacked militarily, for example, and we don't want sanctions on Iran.

Really, that's as far as we'll go. What we're really dealing with here —

**Mr. David Anderson:** What you're saying is that irrespective of what's happening there, you don't want it to impact you here. Is that correct?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** The way we see it is that it is what's going on there and how it's affecting the majority of the population. You mentioned human rights violations, but there are observers who say that sanctions are human rights violations on a grander scale, on a huge scale, in Iran. The difference is really in how you look at it, whether you're looking at the experiences of the aggregate, the entire population. I'm trying to express to you—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I think we've gone way over time here. I'm giving you guys a lot of leeway here.

Next is Mr. Breton, for the Liberals.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.):** Good afternoon. It's very helpful to have both of you here today.

I'd like you to talk about education and culture. I have three children, aged 21, 18, and 15. They attended a multicultural elementary school with many immigrant students. My kids didn't see any difference. When they started at the school, they were just as likely to have friends who were Mexican or Chilean as Iranian. My children's friends who come over are just friends, plain and simple; in my children's eyes, there is no difference. It's at that level where a lot of this happens.

I know your people face considerable discrimination in Canada, and I think that's really a shame.

Could you talk to us about your organization's efforts to raise awareness among Canadian youth and educate them as members of society?

[English]

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Thank you for the question.

A big part is the education of youth, I believe. I have gone through the Canadian public school system. We need to show our children the contributions of Irish Canadians, of newcomers, of others to the Canadian fabric and to Canadian economic, social, and cultural life. I think that's really what needs to happen. Education is a big part.

Unfortunately, we didn't have the time to really get into what we would have liked to talk about, but we need an educational curriculum that really emphasizes the contributions of different communities. Again, especially, we would like to target this kind of stuff as time goes on. If we see a certain community being attacked in society, maybe these are individuals we need to include in such a curriculum, so we can express that these individuals about whom there are a lot of negative stereotypes, for example, have actually contributed to our country. That needs to be addressed.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Ms. Ghasemi, would you care to add anything?

[*English*]

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** Sorry, I don't....

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Do you have something to add?

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** Unfortunately, I didn't get your question. I was listening to the French. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Do you have something to add on the education issue?

**Ms. Soudeh Ghasemi:** On the education issue, yes. In the education system, I do believe that it's very important that there are curricula to teach students how to address discrimination, to battle discrimination, and to understand these concepts. Training in the school environment is very important.

We received a few reports that some students in school have been called terrorists because of their Iranian backgrounds. It's very unfortunate. Once again, this is another example that never turned out to be any sort of case because it wasn't a death threat to anyone. However, it's very important that this curriculum be added to the education system so that youth will learn about this.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Breton.

I will move on to Jenny Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your answers.

As this discussion was going on, it reminded me that this year is the 75th anniversary of the Japanese internment. In British Columbia, we had a number of different events. As you're talking about this, there is this ripple effect of something else that's going on outside of Canada, and somehow there's blowback for the people in that community from the ethnic community.

If this is happening, it appears to me that we haven't learned from our history very well at all, so your point about education is a very good one, especially in the context we're talking about, of children learning about what discrimination looks like. Thank you for that.

I want to get back to this financial agency issue. FICOM, the Financial Institutions Commission, is the regulatory body for banking agencies. In your experience, have people gone to FICOM to make a complaint?

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** I deal with these cases usually on a personal basis. We have, as much as we could, directed individuals. We research and we talk to them and to these financial regulators.

There's another one as well, but unfortunately, it doesn't come to mind. There are two main financial regulatory bodies. I think one is voluntary.

Unfortunately, we haven't seen that going anywhere much. Part of the issue is that, again, our community members are often afraid to take it to that level, but we really encourage them to go that path. It's difficult.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Fair enough. The committee should be looking at how to effectively deal with something like that.

You talked about having collected some data within your organization. I wonder whether or not—because I think my time's running out—you could share some of that data with us on what you have found, the lived experiences of people from your community, and where they have experienced discrimination. What do those examples look like? From that perspective, the committee can take a look at that and see how we can hopefully derive recommendations in that direction.

**Mr. Pouyan Tabasinejad:** Sure.

We're in the process of creating a report out of the survey that we have. Once that report comes out, we'd love to send it to you. Right now it's an internal kind of survey. The results have come in, but we haven't put it into presentation format yet. Once we do, we'd love to share it with you.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Great. That could be shared through the clerk's office for everyone's benefit.

**The Chair:** Any time we ask for any kind of information whatsoever, you send it to the clerk, and the clerk will redistribute it.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

• (1640)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Could you let our witnesses know what the deadline is? I'm worried they may not get it to us until it's too late. We're getting pretty tight. What is the deadline?

**The Chair:** We had agreed that our deadline would be before November 16.

**Mr. Arif Virani:** The November 10, before Remembrance Day.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That's the answer, then.

**The Chair:** It's November 10. On the website, there is a little button that tells you what the deadlines are.

Jenny, have you finished, or did you want to...?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** Well you don't, but since I allowed everybody to go over....

I think we should go to the next group.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming. You gave us a very different perspective on how you are impacted by international events, which we haven't heard from many people. I want to thank you for coming.

Now we'll suspend for about five minutes so we can get the next group of panellists in place.

Thank you again.

•(1640) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1645)

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the meeting to order, please.

Again, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this heritage committee is studying systemic racism and religious discrimination.

We have two panellists here from the Canadian Labour Congress, Larry Rousseau and Elizabeth Kwan, and from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, we have Cindy Blackstock. Welcome. It's an honour to have you here. I know you guys have a lot to offer this hearing.

I'll begin without further ado. Here are the rules: there are 10 minutes per panel. The Canadian Labour Congress panellists have 10 minutes between them. Cindy, you have 10 minutes. I will give you an eight-minute warning so that you will know to round it up in two minutes.

We'll begin with the Canadian Labour Congress.

**Mr. Larry Rousseau (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the standing committee for your invitation.

The Canadian Labour Congress is the largest labour organization in Canada, with 56 affiliated Canadian and international unions, provincial federations of labour, and regional labour councils. The CLC represents 3.3 million workers across all private and public sectors. Indigenous workers, racialized workers, and workers of all faiths are a growing and important part of our labour movement, and any attack on them is an attack on us all. As trade unionists, the CLC and its affiliates continue to stand strong in solidarity to eradicate the forces of hate, racism, and discrimination that divide us.

Systemic racism and discrimination in Canada is well and alive. In 2015, 48% of police reports showed that hate crimes were motivated by hatred of a race or ethnicity, and 35% were motivated by hatred of a religion. Between 2014 and 2015, police reported hate crimes rose by 5%, mainly attributable to the increase of racial and religious hate-related crimes.

The unprecedented rise of Islamophobia and religious discrimination in Canada is very disturbing. There have been attacks on Muslim women wearing hijabs, vandalism of mosques, threats and verbal abuse, numerous anti-Islam and anti-Muslim protests, and anti-racist, anti-fascist counter-protests across Canada.

Most horrifying of all was the terrorist gun attack on the Centre culturel islamique de Québec during evening prayers on January 29, 2017, that left six Muslim worshippers dead and 19 injured. The labour movement condemns in the strongest possible terms any acts of violence against Muslims.

Religious hate crimes against women rose between 2014 and 2015 due to the increase in victimization of Muslim as well as Jewish women.

The very recent Bill 62 in Quebec will likely worsen matters. Bill 62 ostensibly ensures religious neutrality, but de facto it's an attack on the rights of Muslim women who cover their face from receiving or delivering public services. The particularly gendered exclusionary

impact of this bill is discriminatory. It is also wrong to ask workers providing public services to participate in the violation of rights that are promised to every Canadian under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as provincial human rights codes. We must stand up against Islamophobia and categorically reject policies that discriminate against people of the Muslim faith.

Racism and discrimination have no place in our unions, in our communities, or in our country. Today indigenous people, as well as black and racialized Canadians, are still more likely to be carded, under surveillance, and incarcerated. There have been anti-immigrant flyers and protests targeting Chinese and Sikh communities, police violence and shootings of black Canadians and indigenous people, and racist epithets hurled at racialized Canadians in public.

Muslim and racialized Canadians, as well as indigenous people, continue to experience employment discrimination, wage disparities, and lack of opportunities, in particular if they are women, live with a disability, and/or are LGBTQ. They continue to be the most impoverished in Canada.

Lastly, even Canada's low-wage streams of the temporary foreign worker program systemically discriminate against racialized workers from poorer countries in the south by weakening their rights through tied employer work permits and offering little hope of Canadian citizenship. These developments project urgency and compel us to act with even more fortitude.

At the CLC convention in May, 3,500 union delegates affirmed our commitment to pursue public policies that respect the dignity and rights of all working people regardless of race, religion, immigration status, or country of origin. With our affiliates, we are committed to educating the rank and file to inoculate them against right-wing populism, and we are ready to assist the government to better make diversity our country's strength.

•(1650)

We also have seven recommendations for the standing committee.

First, the government has to immediately implement the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This also includes government actions to support the ongoing work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and develop a strategy and prioritize the implementation of the inquiry's findings and recommendations.

Second, reinstate Canada's action plan against racism to activate a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination. This would help Canada comply with the requirements of the UN World Conference Against Racism.

Third, the government must repeal the effects of legislation that characterizes or insinuates racist stereotypes and propagates fear in Canada, specifically the Conservatives' Bill C-51, the Anti-terrorism Act, and Bill S-7, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act. These should be repealed.

Fourth, the government must strengthen the federal Employment Equity Act and program, reinstate the \$200,000 government contract threshold for the federal contractors program, and restore mandatory compliance requirements equivalent to the Employment Equity Act itself.

Fifth, immediately introduce proactive pay equity legislation that will close the wage disparity, in particular for racialized Muslim, black, and indigenous women.

Sixth, the government should increase funding to support anti-racism and anti-oppression programs.

Seventh, the government should collect disaggregated data by ethno-racial and religious background across all departments, crown corporations, and other relevant institutions for better analysis and evidence-based policy-making, to eradicate systemic racism and discrimination.

I thank you for the opportunity to present, and I look forward to your questions.

[Translation]

Whichever language you would like to ask them in is fine with me.

Thank you.

• (1655)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

I will move to Ms. Blackstock, for 10 minutes, please.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada):** First of all, I would like to begin by recognizing that we're on unceded Algonquin territory and thanking you for the opportunity.

Children may not always listen to their elders, the saying goes, but they never fail to imitate them, so the question is, what kind of example are we setting, domestically and internationally, for the children of this generation in terms of the way that we treat one another and the way that we address and acknowledge discrimination, both at an individual level and at a structural level?

Here it requires a courageous conversation, because sometimes it's we, the good guys, who are doing the harm. In this case, it is the Canadian government that continues to racially discriminate against first nations children. That has to be acknowledged, not only because it relates to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's top call to action about equity and child welfare to make sure that we raise this generation of children safely in their families, but also because it's simply the right thing to do.

What have we learned from history? That is the other piece. We apologized for residential schools, and then we apologized for the sixties scoop, and now Canada is out of compliance with four legal

orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to end racial discrimination with children. What have we actually learned from residential schools? What have we learned from the past? How do we prepare this generation of children to learn from those past actions of racial discrimination, affecting indigenous peoples and others, in ways that prepare them to address injustices, both in a contemporary format and going forward into the future?

Today we saw in census figures that we're not holding up our promise to the residential school survivors in terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action number one. Over 40% of all children under four in child welfare care today are first nations children. Keep in mind that when children were removed for residential schools, they were removed at the tender age of five, and we saw the cataclysm that created. These are preschoolers.

Chairperson, as a physician, you know that the first 2,000 days of life lay down the fundamental building blocks of life. It's also a time, important to this committee's mandate, when children learn languages, particularly the indigenous languages, which are so at risk in this country in many cases. That's why Canada's compliance with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal orders is so essential. It's essential because it's about giving a generation of first nations children a chance to grow up equitably and fairly in this country, but it's also about preparing a generation of non-indigenous children so that they never have to say they're sorry again.

A contemporary tragedy is unfolding in front of us all. It's not behind us. It's not in the residential schools or the sixties scoop. There are more first nations kids in care today than at any time in history. We have an opportunity to do something about it by providing equitable and culturally based child welfare services to first nations communities as the tribunal required and by ensuring the full and proper implementation of Jordan's principle so that first nations children can access all the public services they need, when they need them, and without additional red tape related to their first nations status. The third thing that can be done is something I call the Spirit Bear plan, which is for members of Parliament to ask the parliamentary budget officer to cost out the aggregate value of all the inequitable services that first nations children face.

Keep in mind that first nations children are not just receiving inequitable child welfare; they're also receiving inequitable education and inequitable early childhood. Some of them can't get clean water, and there are inadequate sanitation systems. As a country, we need to see what that big figure looks like, and then launch something akin to the Marshall Plan after the Second World War to eradicate those inequalities in ways that take full consideration of children's development and children's best interest. If we can rebuild Europe in 10 years, we can certainly correct a fundamental racial injustice that's occurring in this country in far less time than that.

For those who say it's too expensive or too complicated, I ask you this: if we are so broke as a nation that the only way we can fund things like arenas or subway systems is through racial discrimination against children, then what are the children losing to? What does this country really stand for?

● (1700)

I am one taxpayer who would be very happy to put off some of these projects that the government spends on, as much as I would like them, if it means a child will have a proper opportunity to grow up healthy and proud in this country for the first time in their culture's history. Start off your 151 with a positive legacy.

I am going to move on to something else about learning from history, which is less well known in our work. We are honoured to collaborate with Beechwood Cemetery, which is Canada's national cemetery; KAIROS; Project of Heart; Truth and Reconciliation commissioners Marie Wilson and Murray Sinclair; historian John Milloy; and Ellen Gabriel.

We recognize that in Canada's national cemetery are some of the leading characters in the residential school story.

Peter Henderson Bryce was the doctor who blew the whistle in 1907 on the preventable causes of death of children. He found that kids were dying at a rate of 25% a year from preventable causes, and he knew that with an additional \$10,000 to \$15,000 from the Canadian government, many of those children's lives could be saved. He was a chief medical officer in Canada. His findings were published in papers. He is buried there.

Duncan Campbell Scott, the leading bureaucrat on the residential schools file for 52 years, the man who refused to implement Dr. Bryce's reforms, is also buried there.

Nicholas Flood Davin was the person who wrote the Davin report, which was requisitioned by John A. Macdonald and led to the founding of industrial schools here in Canada.

We've created historical plaques that accurately tell the stories of these people. Duncan Campbell Scott, for example, is recognized as being a confederate poet, but he is also recognized as being a key actor in what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission found to be cultural genocide. His historical plaque includes both passages: confederate poet and cultural genocide. For Dr. Bryce, the full story of his career is told as well, and it's the same with Nicholas Flood Davin.

I think this is something very essential: teaching, at a time when people are talking about taking down monuments. I actually don't agree with taking down monuments. I agree with telling the full and

proper truth, and this is something that I'd like to see the National Capital Commission embrace with a lot more vigour. For example, just a couple of years ago there was an exhibit on Laurier and Macdonald, and it talked about the building of the railway and the first francophone prime minister. It said nothing about their respective roles in residential schools. John A. Macdonald was an enthusiastic endorser of them, and hired Duncan Campbell Scott; Laurier was prime minister at the time when Dr. Bryce's reforms hit the newspaper, and he did not press for those reforms to be implemented and those kids' lives to be saved.

If we are to learn from the past, we have to accurately tell the history of the country. We have to train a generation of children to learn from our collective history, and not just the good and shiny parts. We have collaborated with Project of Heart. We've taken all the historical research that we've done for those plaques and converted it into school curriculum so that children are learning about these historical figures all over Canada as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission work.

In addition to that, to promote the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, we have developed free activities that all children and families can do, which are peaceful, respectful, and evidence-based, and which make a meaningful difference.

We not only want to address the contemporary injustices, but we urge you to recommend, in this committee, that Canada immediately comply fully with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's orders.

We recommend that you work with the National Capital Commission, and we hope that they would be inspired by our reconciling history project to create historical plaques here in Ottawa that recognize the true telling of history.

We ask you to endorse the Spirit Bear plan to end the inequalities across all areas, and of course to fund and support indigenous languages with the same vigour and enthusiasm with which you do French and English in this country. To me, it is a travesty that indigenous languages are not recognized as the official languages of this country, when the name of the country itself comes from a first nations word. If we truly want to live up to being a village, which is what "kanata" actually means, we need to respect and honour the peoples who were the original founders of this nation.

With that, I thank you.

● (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we go to the second part, and that means the question-and-answer part. We have a seven-minute session, and that means the question and the answer must take seven minutes. Because we are going to have bells soon, I'm going to make everybody keep to their time.

We begin with Dan Vandal for the Liberals, for seven minutes.



**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** First of all, thank you, Cindy, for your very compassionate and compelling presentation. On behalf of the elected officials here, and as an individual who graduated from the school of social work at the University of Manitoba, I congratulate you for your tremendous work and advocacy over many years for indigenous children.

I want to begin by trying to understand the ruling from the tribunal. I'm trying to clarify it. The original complaint by you and an agency you work for, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, pursuant to the Canadian Human Rights Act, refers to Canada's underfunding of child welfare on reserves.

I'm trying to get a better understanding. Is the ruling pursuant only to indigenous children on reserves? The reason I ask is that in Manitoba, where I come from, we have all sorts indigenous agencies now—for example, the Métis agency—that are in rural areas but principally in Winnipeg. Does that ruling affect the Métis children at the Manitoba Métis Child, Family and Community Services?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** It's an excellent question. The reason the original complaint dealt with first nations children on reserve in the Yukon with regard to the child welfare component—the Jordan's principle component was on and off reserve, so that's the second part of the complaint—is that Canada, through the Department of Indian Affairs first nations child and family service program, only funds status Indian children on reserve and in the Yukon for the provision of child and family services. It was that program that we were alleging was, and was later found to be, racially discriminatory.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** What you're saying is that the finding is only relevant to first nation children on reserve.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** The specific finding on the child welfare portion is on reserve and in the Yukon, the whole Yukon territory, and for Jordan's principle, it's on and off reserve.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Okay. That's good.

Five million dollars spent on child welfare in downtown Winnipeg is not going to go as far as \$5 million spent in Shamattawa, Hollow Water, and different reserves. How much of that is due to things costing more on reserves that are isolated? We all know things cost more in communities that are isolated.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** Part of the inequity is driven by remoteness, but the inequity exists regardless of where the first nations agency is. For example, I worked at the Squamish first nations child welfare agency, called Ayas Men Men, which is located in North Vancouver. I also worked off reserve for the Province of B. C. Literally, when I crossed the road, the inequities were immediately apparent in the funding, and particularly the services that I took for granted to support families off reserve were simply not funded by the federal government.

That's what we found in testimony and in federal government documents that were brought before the tribunal: regardless of location, the discrimination was there, and in more remote areas, the discrimination was deeper because of the issues you talk about.

• (1710)

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** One of the first jobs I had was in 1986 at the Ma Mawi Centre in the city of Winnipeg. I'm not sure if you're

familiar with it. The child welfare system back then, in 1986, was in disarray.

It hasn't gotten any better in Manitoba, regardless of who's elected. In fact, currently there are 12,000 children in care in Manitoba, which I believe is a historical record high. Many people are saying that the system is broken, that it needs to be reworked, and that there are actually incentives to apprehend children.

Will more money for a broken system solve that problem, or do we have to structurally rethink how child welfare is delivered?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think there is something to be said for rethinking how child welfare is delivered. Personally, I'd like to see the definition of neglect thought out a bit more so that it doesn't codify structural discrimination as a parental deficit and it holds families accountable for what they can change, but not for what they can't change.

That said, what the tribunal found is that Canada's inequitable funding actually is the incentive for the removal of kids, because there is inadequate provision of child and family services. They find that in the ruling.

Another important thing is that we have seen examples—for example, at Mi'kmaw Family and Child Services—where funding levels have gone up about 300% due to their strong advocacy and the tribunal ruling. They have reduced the number of children in care in that province by about 40% over a period of two years. The agencies know that they can do better, but they need the resources there to be able to do that job. Inequitable funding in any recipe of children's services does not enable success.

**The Chair:** You have one and a half minutes.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** The reason would be, though, that the extra funding would have to go through prevention services to keep families together and to keep young people occupied, and not to apprehension. Can you comment about that?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** Right. Those are two separate funding streams, and what the tribunal was looking at is exactly what you're talking about.

The other piece is we need to have equitable salaries for social workers. We need to have safe buildings for children and families to come into, and that whole package is what the tribunal ruling really centres on.

For children coming into care, they're reimbursed at actual cost by the federal government, so that's less of an issue. The real issue is bolstering up these supports so families can become healthy and keep their kids at home. Prevention is the key.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Do you have a number for how much it would cost to close the gap or to erase the gap?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** We don't know exactly what it would be to erase the gap fully. We know regions are preparing those summaries right now. We have suggested as of the ruling date, as of January 26, that our best estimate, based on government documents, is it would require an immediate injection of \$216 million just to take the immediate sting off the discrimination. That wouldn't address the whole problem.

Canada's budget in 2016 provided \$71 million, of which the department took \$10 million, so roughly just less than 25% of what was required was provided in that budget.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move to David Anderson for the Conservatives for seven minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I would like to follow up on that a little, if you don't mind. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

What kinds of preventative things can we do to support families? The key in so many ways is keeping families together if we can possibly do that. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations? That deals with so many of the issues that we have in this motion if we can do that.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think that's where the Spirit Bear plan is really critical in costing out that number for all of those inequalities. We know from good-quality research that the drivers of the over-representation of first nations children in care are predominantly poor housing, poverty, and substance misuse related to unresolved mental health due to multi-generational impacts of residential schools. What we have seen is that when those issues are effectively targeted as child welfare interventions and you're addressing the wholesale inequalities across the board, then you see substantial improvements in child safety.

I'll give you one quick example. In a U.S. study of 14,000 families, half of these families got to keep an additional \$100 per year, and that was it. The other families didn't. The families that got to keep the additional \$100 a year saw a 10% reduction in substantiated child maltreatment rates. It shows how dealing with those poverty and basic needs measures really help keep kids safe.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I asked something similar to this of Judge Sinclair when he was here: do we need different strategies for urban and rural areas?

• (1715)

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think we do, because you find different constellations of indigenous peoples in urban areas. However, I think it's fundamentally the same: having a responsiveness to culture, a responsiveness to language, and equity as the base. It's targeting those areas that put families under the most stress: the poverty, the poor housing in urban areas, and the lack of culturally based services.

**Mr. David Anderson:** What about economic development? Where should that come from?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think that is a key piece. I'm not an expert on the economic development piece. That's more to the national chief of the AFN and others who are in that portfolio, but I think that relates back, for me, on the children's issues of education.

If we have an underfunded first nations education system, we cannot produce children who are going to be able to pursue the careers of their dreams. We're seeing time and time again kids with such great potential, but they are simply not being given the opportunity to enter the job market and to create innovative economic opportunities for others.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Good. Thank you.

Mr. Rousseau, I'm wondering if you can give us your definition of "Islamophobia". Your organization has spoken out about it fairly often and insisted that we support the motion. Do you have a definition that we can use?

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** I think we should stay away from talking about definitions. Islamophobia is a very simple term. The Greek part is "phobia". It means fear. Islam...I think everybody gets that. Anything that is against Islam, that is anti-Islam, is Islamophobia. If anybody's using that to justify any kind of action, whether it is against or for policies, etc., then that is what it is. I really think we have a problem when people are going to start saying one thing is Islamophobia, but another doesn't fall under it.

If we were to talk about homophobia, for example, or any discrimination that we have the terms for, it's the people who are impacted by the actions of a majority or of another group who are the ones who know what it is.

As far as coming out with a definition for Islamophobia, I would stay away from that because it should be very wide-ranging and it shouldn't forgive anything.

Look, if you're going to do anything that denigrates—actually oppresses or suppresses a group, namely people who are Muslim—then it is Islamophobia.

**Mr. David Anderson:** That's interesting, because we've had witnesses who have said basically that because it means everything to some people, then it doesn't mean anything, and we should throw the term out.

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** Well, I don't think we should really get into that kind of a debate, because who does it profit to say we're going to simply throw it out because it says everything?

**Mr. David Anderson:** In this case, it was Muslims who were saying it profits them to throw it out. I don't know what your reaction is to that idea, but that's where it was coming from—people within that community saying this definition just doesn't work. They said we should just throw it out and go with some other things.

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** Well, then, I repeat, you're saying "this definition". Someone tried to define it, and that's where you're getting into the problem. Stop trying to define what it is, because then you get into a debate in which all of a sudden some people can say it's nothing.

If anyone who is a Muslim finds that an action is against them as a Muslim, that should define or at least characterize what it is. Islamophobia means anything that will hurt, denigrate, etc., just as any other group would see it if it was a different group.

**Mr. David Anderson:** You carried it, then, as far as perception, so if someone is perceiving that something's happened, then you would consider that to be Islamophobia as well.

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** Let me talk about harassment and discrimination.

One of the fundamental notions of harassment is this: it is not the person who is doing the harassing, but the person who has been impacted by the harassment. If someone says it's Islamophobia and they feel they have been discriminated against, then that's what you should use.

Otherwise, as soon as you start to get into that, you get into problems.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Should people be allowed, then, to hold views that are disagreeable to others? Whether they're religious or not, everyone holds a set of beliefs that are very different. People have reason, they feel, to criticize others and dislike them, or to feel they're different from them. What are you saying in terms of this situation, then? Should people not be allowed to do that, or can we have those deep differences and discuss them and feel that deep difference? How do we deal with this?

It's not just religious communities; it's secular understanding. In reality, various religious communities all have very deep understandings, and they differ.

• (1720)

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** The word is quite simple. It's respect. As long as it's respectful, you can have those debates and those criticisms.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Kwan is next, for the NDP.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I thank all of our witnesses for their very thoughtful presentations today for our committee.

Let me direct my first question to Dr. Blackstock, and first say an enormous thank you to you for your lifelong dedication to the important issue of addressing systemic discrimination, and particularly to upholding the rights of indigenous children.

I want to touch on this issue around the systemic impact of discrimination for indigenous children. So often, the issue ties into poverty. People live in poverty because of that trauma over the years, and then there's fallout from that. That's what we're seeing to a large degree—the intergenerational impact.

I wonder if you can elaborate for us on that aspect of it, in terms of direct government actions in addition to the recommendations that you've put forward.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that these are little kids who at every turn of their lives are getting less of an opportunity to succeed and be healthy. They don't know that people in Ottawa are making a decision that they get less; they just know that life is really hard for them, and when they go on the Internet they see other youth doing quite well.

Then there's the Canadian public, who often don't know any better, and who judge them and their communities as if they get more than everybody else, not less. What happens to these children and these youth is that they start to internalize that and feel they aren't worth it, that they aren't smart, that they'll never go anywhere. That's why we see the high correlation between inequity and youth suicide, why we see the high correlation between inequity and child health issues, inequity and juvenile justice, and the inequity in child welfare.

The symptoms are profound when you disrupt equal opportunity for children. That's why that Spirit Bear plan is so essential. It's because we have to know what all these inequalities are, because in 2017 we cannot be a society that accepts racial discrimination as government policy toward children at any level, yet we are accepting it. Let's make that clear: we are accepting that we are giving first nations kids less funding for education, less funding for child welfare. Once we do that, we normalize it, and it's easy to perpetuate it. We need to say there's no acceptable level of racial discrimination against children, first nations children or any other children, in public policy in the Canadian government.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

For the benefit of this committee, I wonder if you could table the Spirit Bear plan for us in its detail, so we can have that information for our consideration.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I don't have it with me, but I can certainly submit it.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That would be fantastic. Thank you.

I'd like to touch on this in terms of child welfare. A very good friend of mine recently told me she was presented with a scenario of a child coming to school looking dishevelled and dirty, and people thought there were some issues. Immediately, child welfare was brought in. The immediate reaction was to say, "We have to apprehend." My friend then said, "Let's first take a look at the situation and see what's going on." They investigated the situation and, lo and behold, what did they find? They found that in the home of the child the plumbing system was broken and they did not have the resources to fix it. That's why the child's hair looked dirty, and so on. Then my friend said to her staff, "How can we address this? Can we not provide the resources, as the ministry, to this family to fix the plumbing?" People said, "Oh, no, no, we can't do that." Then she said, "Yes, we can", and so she did. They provided \$1,000 to fix the plumbing, and all is well. This family got on and no child was apprehended.

I put this out as an example of what is wrong with our child welfare system in addressing the systemic issues, which are intergenerational, but also with our societal issues of where we spend our resources, how we spend our resources to fix the problem, and instead of breaking up a family, how we can actually not do that for the benefit of the family. I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that if you follow that trajectory, there will be savings to the taxpayers.

I offer that, and I wonder whether that would be a wise move in terms of—

• (1725)

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** —an approach that we should undertake for our child welfare system across this country.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** That's why I was talking about the importance of the Spirit Bear plan in getting at the structural drivers, and just in general in child welfare. I'd like to see that reflection on the definition of “neglect”, because it implies that the parent is the one doing all of the neglecting, when in some cases it's not; it's societal public policy that's neglectful.

I believe in holding caregivers' feet to the fire for things they can change, but it's not fair and it's not just to hold their feet to the fire for things they can't change. Think about all the first nations families out there. One in six first nations is on a boil-water advisory.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I only have a little time left, so I want to—

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** My colleague, Romeo Saganash, has tabled a bill, Bill C-262, An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I think people know about this bill. I want a quick answer, yes or no, from everybody around the table as to whether or not the CLC supports it, and also from yourself, Dr. Cindy Blackstock.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** Yes, we support it.

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** We do too.

**The Chair:** That was quick.

Thank you. You did very well.

Next is Julie Dzerowicz, from the Liberals.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I want to thank both groups for their wonderful presentations.

Dr. Blackstock, thank you so much for your advocacy around the systemic inequities in the services offered to first nations youth, families, and children. I know that your advocacy has led to a lot of positive change, particularly within our own government. We now have a Minister of Indigenous Services who is very interested in this issue. I know she's met with you many times. She's very passionate about making sure that Jordan's principle is implemented.

We've added quite a bit of money, and I know that 99% of the requests have been approved. Some 20,000 more children are getting services they didn't have before, but we have a heck of a lot more we have to do.

I very much appreciate your recommendations today.

We're grappling with developing a whole-of-government approach to reducing systemic and religious discrimination. We've had a number of groups come before us. We've had the black community, the Chinese, and the Iranians. We've had many. We've had a number of religious groups. We had the Muslim and the Jewish communities come before us.

As we're putting forward some recommendations, I want to see where we put indigenous people. Is it a separate plan? How does it fit within a national action plan?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think it is a distinct relationship. It's a distinct constitutional relationship, a distinct historical and discriminatory relationship.

Take the systemic underfunding of first nations children's services. That is not something other groups of children experience in this country. It is something that is unique to the experience of indigenous children, and it's not a positive experience. We're hopefully going to get there. I think it's very important that it be treated distinctly.

I'd also recommend this approach for other groups as well. It's so easy sometimes to collapse people's experiences together and try to come up with general solutions. There are, however, some things that are universal. For example, there should be an anti-racism strategy. That's something that United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended to Canada in its recent review. That is an important piece.

I think that we need to totally respect the distinct circumstances that different groups experience in this country. We need to also redouble our efforts with children and young people. We need public education that teaches respect across differences—not overcoming differences. Overcoming differences could be colonialism. What we want to do is respect differences by co-creating a peaceful and respectful society where diversity is welcomed.

• (1730)

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Okay. I appreciate that.

We've also talked quite a bit about intersectionality and taking it into account. We heard from Senator Murray Sinclair. One of the statements he made was that there's more discrimination against indigenous women than there is against most of the rest of the groups across Canada. Would you have a comment on how we should incorporate intersectionality into our national action plan?

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think it's really key. When I was recruited by the women's movement, I couldn't relate to it. The discrimination I experienced as a first nations person was far greater than what these women were experiencing in the workplace. Of course, I had that on top of it, but compared to what I had already experienced, these other women had undergone much less.

I think it's very important to understand that you can have compound layers of discrimination. That has to be respected. People should be able to identify the various groups they belong to that may be discriminated against. You may be a first nations person. You may be a woman. You may be a person living in poverty, which is a huge area for discrimination that we don't talk enough about. You may be a person with a disability.

I think it's important to recognize these compounds layers in public education. We should do that piece as well. People should be alerted to the fact that we may be welcoming and we may not think of ourselves as racially discriminating, but we may actually be discriminating in other ways. We need to be appreciating that.

**The Chair:** Just a minute, Ms. Dzerowicz.

I wanted to ask for the unanimous agreement of the committee to finish up the five minutes. We'll have ample time to get to the vote.

Do I get it? Yes. Good.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Let's also give unanimous consent to discussing the finance figures being passed around.

**The Chair:** All right. We have a couple of new finance figures.

We're going to make up the time. Don't worry, Julie. We will make up the time.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** We're talking a lot about education, and one of the other elements when we talk about education is coming up with a counter-narrative. We've been talking a bit about that. We've also been talking a little bit about the role of media and maybe some recommendations around them.

I don't know if you have any for us.

Then I want to move over to the Canadian Labour Congress.

**Dr. Cindy Blackstock:** I think the media really are an outgrowth of the type of education about indigenous peoples that's been offered in this country, which means that very few of them have had any meaningful education at all on first nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples in this country.

I'm grateful to those people in the media pool who really have doubled up their efforts and are doing some excellent coverage despite that, but I would like to see the major broadcasting companies undertake mandatory training, not just for the field reporters and researchers but also for the producers and the administrative staff at those various media outlets as well, so that the story is told accurately and we use the great power of the media to do education.

We should also be promoting things like APTN more often. It is a great way for the average Canadian citizen to learn more about first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Promoting indigenous media as part of mainstream education is important.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you so much.

I'll turn now to the Canadian Labour Congress.

What steps does the Canadian Labour Congress take to ensure that systemic discrimination and religious discrimination don't happen within labour groups right now?

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** First of all, I think that if you look at the constitutions and policies of any union affiliated with the CLC, you'll see that we all have very clear statements.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** How do you ensure that they're followed and that they're actually adhered to?

**Mr. Larry Rousseau:** I don't think there is any union meeting held at which we don't read the statement right up front. We have a statement on harassment and discrimination, such that if anyone experiences it in any form, within the union there is a process for them to bring that forward, along with complaints and all of that. We try to teach by example, so if there's zero tolerance for it within our unions and in all conventions, all meetings, and all conferences, that's the way it should be in society.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I'm asking this because we're also looking at how under a national action plan we would work with organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress. What would be your recommendation in terms of how we could do that? It could also be with similar groups.

● (1735)

**Ms. Elizabeth Kwan (Senior Researcher, Canadian Labour Congress):** I would say that the unions are very strong. We have a lot of internal groups that work on equity issues, and we have different equity groups, so it's not just one. We have indigenous, racialized, workers with disabilities, and LGBTQ working groups.

We have done a lot of work in the past. Of course we do policy work on all of these fronts, but we also provide a lot of supports to our own members in terms of tools, in terms of outreach, and in terms of making sure that things are delivered in their own communities and in their own unions.

For the Syrian refugee situation, for example, unions raised \$350,000 without a blink to support Syrian refugees, but that wasn't enough, because we wanted people to actually do something outside of just writing a cheque, so we provided them with a tool for working in their own communities with community groups to learn how to work together to support the newcomers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Kwan.

I think we have made up the time for Ms. Dzerowicz.

We need to go in camera to get the okay on a small piece, and this is my fault. I gave you the budget, but I didn't give you the video conferencing budget.

We are going to go in camera now, so people will have to leave the room very quickly.

Thank you very much, Dr. Blackstock, Mr. Rousseau, and Ms. Kwan, for your very important testimony.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*











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