

Religious freedom report fails to address Summer Jobs attestation

An Ottawa report on religious discrimination fails to address ongoing religious discrimination by governments such as the Canada Summer Jobs attestation says the [Catholic Civil Rights League](#).

In fact, the majority on the Heritage Committee who released the Feb. 1 report entitled [Taking action against systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia](#), ignored “actual examples of religious discrimination in our midst,” said league president Phil Horgan.

The Employment Minister Patty Hajdu extended the Feb. 2 deadline for Canada Summer Jobs applications by a week. However, despite opposition from Catholic, Evangelical, Muslim and Jewish faith leaders, she refused to remove the controversial pro-abortion attestation that applicants must check off, or else their application will not be considered.

“We look forward to the majority on the committee speaking out on the improper demands for attestation from faith groups against their deeply held convictions against abortion when it comes to applying for summer job grants,” Horgan said.

“We can only hope that their words may prove of assistance in dealing with certain professional regulatory bodies to recognize deeply held convictions of physicians against immoral procedures, or by approving the accreditation of prospective Christian law schools.”

Horgan was referring to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario’s (CPSO) policy demanding effective referral on euthanasia, assisted suicide and other procedures despite conscientious objection on moral or professional judgment grounds.

On Jan. 31, the Ontario Divisional Court upheld the [CPSO policy](#), despite recognizing it infringes on religious freedom and that other jurisdictions had found ways to guarantee access to euthanasia and assisted suicide without violating conscience rights.

Horgan was also referring to the battle now before the Supreme Court of Canada by Trinity Western University to get its proposed law school accredited. Ontario and British Columbia’s law societies are the only ones that refuse to accredit future law students of the private evangelical Christian university because it has a community covenant asking all students, faculty and staff abstain from sexual relations outside of traditional marriage.

The League is "pleased" the report pointed out "in a forceful way that religious discrimination was an ongoing issue," said Horgan, a constitutional lawyer.

"However, the fine words of the committee seem to be ignored when governments or government agencies choose to act in opposition to religious freedom, the first fundamental right listed in the Charter."

Constitutional lawyer Don Hutchinson, author of *Under Siege: Religious Freedom and the Church in Canada at 150* said he hopes the government will act on the recommendation to update and reinstate "the previous Canadian Action Plan Against Racism and broadening it to include religious discrimination through consultations with civil society, grassroots organizations, and interfaith groups."

"I think if the government takes any steps that will heighten its sensitivity to Canadian religious communities, it will be a substantial improvement over what we're seeing with the Canada Summer Jobs fiasco," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson also liked the recommendation that a directorate be created in the Heritage Department to monitor and act on the National Action Plan.

"Both the majority report and the dissenting report give clarity in regard to the danger in using the undefinable word Islamophobia, and then shift their focus to dealing with the issues of racism and religious discrimination," Hutchinson said.

"Much of the report contends with matters of racism, however, there good indication that the actions suggested in regards to religious discrimination will involve parliamentarians in engaging with civil society, interfaith groups, grassroots organizations and the broader Canadian faith communities in general."

The Conservative minority report pointed out the claim in M-103 of "an increasing public climate of hate and fear" was unsubstantiated by the evidence. It also continued to insist the word "Islamophobia" should not be used, but should be replaced by "anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination.

Many witnesses, including several Muslims, who appeared before the Heritage Committee warned about the many definitions of Islamophobia. Some include criticism of the beliefs and practices of Islam that border on blasphemy laws.

"All beliefs and practices, religious and non-religious, must be open to critical evaluation and peaceful dialog, debate and dissension," Hutchinson said he told the committee.



Former ambassador Andrew Bennett

Former ambassador of religious freedom Andrew Bennett was quoted in the report in his statement to the committee: “. . . we need to address anti- Muslim hatred that exists in this country... these selfsame evils manifest themselves in hatred of Jews, Catholics, LGBTQ persons, people who oppose same-sex marriage, first nations people, pro-lifers.”

The Catholic Civil Rights League opposed the original motion M-103 because “discrimination against any or all religions should be addressed, without some form of priority for Islam,” Horgan said. “That does not take away from our horror at the tragic shootings which occurred in January, 2017.”

The Liberal majority report recommends that Jan. 29, the date of the Quebec City mosque shooting that killed six and wounded 19 others while at prayer, “be designated as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination.”