HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

CHPC • NUMBER 085 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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● (1530)

[*English*]

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

I'm sorry; we're checking on one of our witnesses to see where she is. In the meantime, we will have the committee business, which was set for the front end of the meeting, now moved to the back end of the second hour, because of the fact that I'm looking at the time and the orders of the day, and it would be easier to do it that way.

I think in the interests of time, I will begin with the witnesses who are here. Ms. Mohammed has not arrived yet. I will introduce Mr. Achab, professor of linguistics at the University of Ottawa; and from the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council, Faisal Khan Suri, president, and Aurangzeb Qureshi, vice-president, public policy and communications.

You have 10 minutes to present to the committee, but since you both belong to one group, your group has 10 minutes. You can decide how you're going to split that time.

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

I shall begin with the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council for 10 minutes.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi (Vice-President, Public Policy and Communications, Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council): I appreciate that.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Chair, before we start, can we get some clarity? We have four witnesses listed here and we're thankful that we've got two of them with us.

Can you give us a little information about the other two? You said you were looking for one of them, but we're missing two people. I'm wondering if you have any idea of where they are.

The Chair: We're only missing one.

● (1535)

Mr. David Sweet: On our list we're missing two, I'm sorry to say.

A voice: Karim Achab and Yasmine Mohammed.

The Chair: Mr. Achab's name is not there. It's hidden from my view.

Mr. David Sweet: No, it's not.

The Chair: We will start with the witnesses we have here, while the clerk tries to round up or help them through security.

We shall begin.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the committee for giving us this opportunity to present in regard to the study on systemic racism and religious discrimination. We also appreciate the presence of the opposition and members, and their dedication to the subject of discrimination, and Islamophobia specifically.

My name is Aurangzeb Qureshi, as the chair mentioned. I'm the VP for public policy and communications of the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council, and with me is Faisal Khan Suri, president. We hope our recommendations will help contribute towards reducing and eliminating racism and discrimination in Canada, which also includes Islamophobia.

Just to give you a bit of history on the organization, AMPAC was formed in late 2014, after a string of Islamophobic attacks in Alberta. As such, the organization's mandate is to protect the individual and collective rights of Muslims in a variety of different political and legal settings in Alberta.

We are one of the leading advocates for religious and cultural accommodation in Alberta. The organization actively participates in policy and legal discussions on the treatment of religious and cultural minorities in the province.

AMPAC is also seen as an expert on anti-discrimination and anti-racism efforts in Alberta, not just for Muslims but for all religious minorities. AMPAC has also advocated on policies that provide greater recognition for the rights of minority communities.

As for some highlights in terms of what we've done, we continue to consult with the federal and provincial governments on a variety of legislation concerning the rights, liberties, and recognition of Muslims in Alberta, including in relation to national security and hate crime legislation. We are working on an Andalusian curriculum for Alberta's public education system to ensure that the history of positive interaction between Muslims, Jews, and Christians in medieval Spain is recognized.

We operate an Islamophobia help hotline for the public to report incidents of vandalism and discrimination related to Islamophobia in Alberta. We commentate and speak out against hate crimes of other forms of discrimination in Alberta, including frequently providing expert opinions, publishing op-eds, and arguing for enhanced religious accommodation and acceptance. We host policy forums and workshops with political representatives and members of the public on issues of accommodation of religious and cultural minorities. We collaborate with other faith and cultural communities to foster a broad tolerance of minority accommodation and diversity in Alberta. Last but not least, we organize and facilitate vigils and solidarity events honouring the victims of terrorist attacks in Quebec City and Edmonton.

Moving on to the recommendations, I'm going to kind of build up and come to the recommendation at the end for each of these. There are four recommendations in all. I would like to highlight the AMPAC Islamophobia help hotline that was launched in April 2016, which I alluded to earlier. The hotline was introduced as a tool for the Muslim community and to monitor Islamophobic incidents across Alberta. This was not being done before.

Over the last year, the hotline has received over 400 calls, and we have found that Islamophobic incidents in the province follow a common theme. The targets are either newcomers to Canada who are perceived as Muslim, or women who wear the Islamic head scarf or the hijab. This is evidence that Islamophobia is real. It's not just a Muslim issue; it's an Alberta issue, and it's a Canadian issue.

We understand that paragraph 2(b) of the Charter of the Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression. Those wanting to criticize Islam are free to do so. Such criticism of any faith or ideology is warranted under Canadian law. We are also aware however that such free speech also comes within reasonable limits. There are three specific sections of the Criminal Code dealing with behaviour that some people refer to as hate crimes. Section 318, on hate propaganda, refers specifically to advocating for genocide; section 319, on the public incitement of hatred, refers to stirring up hatred in a public place; and subsection 430(4.1), on mischief relating to religious property, specifically refers to mischief at churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples.

Given the very specific nature of these offences, we have found that it is extremely difficult to charge an individual with a hate crime, and it demands a threshold that is unrealistic. For example, section 319 specifically requires the consent of the Attorney General in order to lay charges, a high bar and something that very few other sections require.

Late last year, in Edmonton, a man pulled a noose from his coat, pointed to two Muslim women wearing the hijab, and told them, “This is for you.” He then proceeded to sing the Canadian national anthem. No charges were laid. Incidents like these create a terrible precedent that essentially provides cover and licence. It tells others that they can engage in these types of practices and discriminatory acts.

● (1540)

AMPAC recommends clarifying the ambiguous nature of section 319 and amending section 318 of Canada's Criminal Code so that a hate incident can be charged as a crime without having to specifically meet such an unrealistic threshold of genocide. The section on mischief should also go beyond religious property and include the utterance of violent, racist threats to be a prosecutable offence. This is in light of the latest Statistics Canada report that indicates police-reported hate crimes had increased 39% in Alberta in 2015, the largest spike among provinces in Canada.

This brings me to recommendation number two. AMPAC also believes that there must be recognition that Islamophobia is a systemic problem, propagated through media and culture, and not a political issue, and that to address it, social change needs to occur at a grassroots educational level. As a result, AMPAC works closely with all three levels of government to ensure that programs are put in place that emphasize the Canadian values of pluralism, inclusion, and acceptance. We are continuously working with the City of Edmonton and Alberta municipalities to provide educational programs and anti-racism initiatives, and also supporting the Alberta provincial government in its efforts to eliminate racism through its engaging Albertans about racism initiative.

AMPAC recommends that the government build the educational capacity and structures necessary to address systemic discrimination on an ongoing basis. This includes supporting the creation of local programs that receive federal funding that focus on getting to know Muslims as normal, everyday people with the same hopes, desires, and aspirations as anyone else. One example of this is—as I alluded to earlier—the Andalusian curriculum that we're working on that shows that Muslims, Jews, and Christians have lived in peace and continue to live in peace and tolerance. The next recommendation as part of this is the creation of a federal board working to reduce and eventually eliminate Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racism with local representation from various provinces at a grassroots level.

AMPAC also has excellent relationships with law enforcement across the province. We have received tremendous support from local police and see them as equal partners in AMPAC's success. We continue to have frank discussions with law enforcement about security issues and the rise of far-right organizations such as The Three Percenters, Worldwide Coalition against Islam, and the Soldiers of Odin, all of which have a presence in Alberta.

At every step, law enforcement has been on our side, but there are certain developments where we feel that may not be the case sometimes. This case is still in the courts, but it raises some red flags. A statement of claim against CSIS lays out the experiences of employees who, after enduring many years of discrimination on the basis of religion, race, and sexual orientation, have finally made their claims public. Three Muslim intelligence officers, known as Bahira, Cemal, and Emran for the purposes of anonymity, noted that anti-Islamic comments and views were common in the workplace. Most notably, the claim states that there was a belief that "all Muslims are suspect, and while they appear to blend in, they could strike at any time". The statement also alleges similar discriminatory behaviour against a gay and black employee by both staff and management.

AMPAC recommends that the committee be proactive and collaborate with the ministry of public safety and ensure that prospective CSIS and RCMP officers are provided with sensitivity training on diversity inclusion. If we truly want to address and eliminate systemic racism, it has to be addressed in the corridors of power. CSIS is one of those corridors that operates in relative obscurity.

Next is recommendation number four. Canada is a land that has historically accepted people from many backgrounds and religions, and continues to do so. Such is also true of the thousands of Syrian refugees who have crossed our borders over the past couple of years. As we already know, many of these refugees are coming to Canada from war-torn countries that have a lasting effect on their mental health. These same children will attend school—

The Chair: Mr. Qureshi, you have one minute left so I would urge you to get to your recommendations, if you have any more. Thank you.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Thank you.

In this case, the last recommendation is we recommend the government to consider and include mental health programs to help refugees immigrating to Canada. Not only will this speed up the integration process, it will also potentially prevent a discriminatory counter reaction.

With this, we'd like to thank the committee again for inviting us. We will be sending a detailed submission with these ideas at a later date.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Welcome, Mr. Achab. You have 10 minutes to give us your presentation.

Professor Karim Achab (Professor of Linguistics, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you.

I have a power point presentation, but I didn't have time to do the connection. You won't be able to see it, but you will be able to hear it.

First, let me make sure that I did not get the context wrong. I got this invitation last Friday, so I had very little time to get prepared. The context is that people are committing acts of violence and terror, killing innocent victims. Other individuals are blamed, retaliated against, and sometimes even killed for those actions when there is no relation whatsoever between the first category—the killers—and the second category. Yes, if nothing is done, other victims might follow, unfortunately. This is, I guess, the motivation behind this committee. The Canadian government has been urged to act quickly to "recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear". This is how it was presented.

This presentation has two parts. I guess it will be five minutes for each. In the first part, I will provide a few comments, first as a linguist, on the word "Islamophobia". Dictionaries do not offer the same definition of the word. A compilation of the different definitions was put online by Kathleen Harris of CBC News. From the different dictionaries, only one matches the one that was officially retained by the committee. It's also the one in circulation. It's also the one that matches the definition by the activists in the Islamic field.

The definition retained by the committee suggests that "rational" hatred is all right, from my understanding, but "irrational" hatred is not okay. We need to know where the borderline stands between what is rational and what is irrational. We know that Canada is a country that does not accept any form of racism, rational or irrational, or any form of discrimination. Spreading hatred is also condemned by Canadian laws.

Now I'll turn to the word "phobia" itself. Phobia is a medical term that refers to one type of mental disorder. If these people who are showing this hatred and doing these killings are phobic, then maybe they need help. It's medical help they need, not a law or anything that condemns them.

The definition provided by the American Psychiatric Association is that phobia is an anxiety disorder "defined by a persistent fear of an object or situation". It is a mental representation. So if we talk about Islamophobia as a phobia—because the word "phobia" is in it—then it is a mental representation that does not match the reality of what a phobia is.

A phobia is a mental representation that does not match the external world. That's why we talk about people with social phobia having an erroneous mental representation of what the crowd is. They are afraid. They are scared to go there, but there is nothing there with the crowd.

We can also speak of claustrophobia, which is when someone is scared of being in an enclosed space. Someone who's claustrophobic is scared of being in an elevator because they think they will get stuck there. Usually they don't. This is also a mental disorder.

Homophobia is another one. Yes, because of the mental representations we have built, which are based on the way that religions and adults present the community of homosexuals—like they're wrongdoers—it is a phobia. It is a wrong mental representation that we all need to correct. We are in 2017. Everybody needs to correct their mental representation of homosexuals. That's it and that's all. They are not wrongdoers. The people who attack them think they are indeed wrongdoers.

● (1550)

You cannot talk about black-ophobia. Nobody speaks about Armen-ophobia, Kurd-ophobia, Yazid-ophobia, or Copt-ophobia—the Copts in Egypt who are slaughtered almost every day. For me, the word Islamophobia is sincerely inappropriate.

Of course, there is this freedom of academic lexical creation. People are free to create words and people are free to use them, but they do not have space in Parliament or any institution that is concerned with laws of a society. This is how I see the problem with the word Islamophobia. There's a difference between enjoying the freedom of academic lexical creation and embracing what the coined word suggests. We need a distance between the word that is offered to us and what is inside the word. Words offer some degree of conditioning. When we take a word, we take the concept and somehow we become conditioned by that definition.

Authors of the initial text coined the term and they offered us a definition. However, by offering us a definition, they're also asking us to change the definition of phobia. Who can do that? Again, the word is not justifiable, is not motivated, from my perspective as a linguist.

All this is just one side of the coin, though the debate about Islamophobia, the word itself and all the debate. What about the other side of the coin? This is the second part of this presentation.

Keeping in mind the context that I have just mentioned earlier, is there any rational fear that Canadian citizens are concerned about? There's this irrational fear, but is there any other rational fear that the Canadian government maybe should address? There is another question: Is anyone having a different opinion necessarily a racist, a white supremacist, or a conservative hiding other intentions under the veil of freedom of speech?

The answer to the first question—is there any rational fear Canadian citizens are concerned with?—is yes. Obviously, yes. The elements of the answer are actually in the debate itself, on TV, in forums of discussion, and group discussions. What is this something else, this other side of the coin? It is the threat between the ideology —

The Chair: You have two minutes left, please.

Prof. Karim Achab: On the threat between a religion and ideology, to some degree, a religion and ideology are always entangled. People need to be protected, but not ideologies. Human rights are about protecting people, not ideologies. The question of how to disentangle these two entities is maybe something that the Canadian society as a whole should consider.

People are also considered by the violence that is inherent to their religion, which is mentioned in the Quran. Now, it's on the Internet. You can google and there are versions of the Quran approved by the King of Saudi Arabia, who is considered as the representative of the Islamic religion.

People need to hear how the Canadian government, Parliament, or the Canadian society intends to address this because Canada also has a tradition of welcoming people and new citizens with whatever they come with, like religion. We need to know how this will be taken care of now and how it is going to be handled.

● (1555)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Achab.

Prof. Karim Achab: I'm just going to conclude with one of the slides.

I will be here to answer your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Achab.

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed, you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed (Author, As an Individual): Ms. Chair, committee members, thank you for inviting me here and giving me the opportunity to speak about something that is very personal to me.

I was born and raised in Canada. I both attended and taught at publicly funded Islamic schools in Canada. I wore a hijab from the age of nine in Canada, and later when I was forced into marriage with a jihadi, I wore a niqab here in Canada as well.

In all those years, I cannot cite one single case of discrimination against me. In fact, it wasn't until I removed my hijab in my late twenties that I realized I had been living a charmed life. Canadians no longer went out of their way to hold the door open for me extra-long, lest they be perceived as racist. They no longer made a point to smile at me, lest they be perceived as racist. Canadians would bend over backwards and part the seas if they could to avoid being perceived as anything but the open-minded, kind-hearted, and welcoming people they are. I've travelled and lived in many parts of this world, and I can say without a doubt that I am so grateful and so privileged to be Canadian.

M-103 aims to quell bigotry against human beings. This is a value that Canadians proudly stand for, a value that we can see manifested in every aspect of our lives as Canadians. Of course, none of us want anyone to ever feel discriminated against. Unfortunately, M-103 is doing the exact opposite of its intent. Rather than quelling bigotry, it is feeding the fire. Because it includes the word “Islamophobia”, that is not about protecting people, Muslims, but is rather about protecting the ideology, Islam.

Canadians, like all people, are afraid. They are concerned about this ideology that seems to be spreading across the planet, an ideology that is killing people every day. Ever since the Paris attacks that happened this very month two years ago, people in the west have been naturally uneasy and suspicious about how a so-called peaceful ideology could be spilling so much blood.

To people like me, people with backgrounds in the Muslim world, this is blasé. We have been dealing with Muslims killing in the name of religion for 1,400 years. We are accustomed to Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadis like al Qaeda and ISIS. I was married to a member of al Qaeda, I had his baby. None of this is a mystery to me. None of this is new. To most Canadians it is new, and it is terrifying. Naturally, when something is new and terrifying, we want to talk about it. We want to question it, we want open dialogue and civil discourse to unpack these ideas and understand why this is happening all around us. M-103, with its mention of the word "Islamophobia" is quashing that natural and healthy desire to question and learn and understand.

The antidote to bigotry and fear is education, but M-103 is telling Canadians, no, you have no right to question, criticize, or fight against this ideology that is killing your fellow human beings. You must bite your tongue when you learn that 13 countries will execute you for being gay, or that the overwhelming majority of girls in Egypt and Sudan have had their clitoris cut out. You must turn the other cheek when you see a child wrapped in clothing that restricts every one of her five senses. You must smile and nod when you see yet another child being forced into marriage where she'll be raped for the rest of her life.

M-103 wasn't around when I was a child, but its premise of Islamophobia is what caused a judge to send me back to my severely abusive family when I was 13 years old. He knew my family had hung me upside down in the garage and whipped the bottoms of my feet, but he sent me back anyway. He sent me back because, as he explained it, different cultures have different ways of disciplining their children. If only I had been born with white skin, then that judge would have deemed me worth protecting. But, alas, I came from the wrong culture, so I was sent back.

In his aim to be culturally sensitive, that judge ended up being incredibly bigoted. He treated me differently from all other Canadian kids because of my cultural background, and that is unacceptable.

Quite often Canadians have the best of intentions, and M-103 is an example of that, but we must be so careful to not have minds so open that our brains fall out. We must be careful to not be so tolerant that we end up tolerating things that should be intolerable. Our hearts are in the right place. We just have to make sure that our minds are as well.

M-103 aims to protect Canadians from racism and religious discrimination. Of course, we all stand behind that value. We are a secular nation. We believe in freedom of religion and freedom from religion. We believe in freedom of thought. What we don't believe in is laws that aim to protect any ideologies, including religion, from scrutiny, criticism, questioning, debate, and even ridicule. I link arms with Muslims like Tarek Fatah and Raheel Raza here in Canada, Imam Tawhidi in Australia, Asra Nomani in the U.S, and Maajid Nawaz in the U.K., Muslims who fight against these archaic laws both in Muslim-majority countries and of course over here in the west.

● (1600)

Most Muslims fled here to escape those draconian, oppressive laws that limit their freedom of speech. The last thing in the world they want is to see those laws following them here into the free western world.

It's been said numerous times by numerous speakers, and I add my voice to the chorus, as long as M-103 has the term "Islamophobia" in it, it will only serve to divide and cause more hate, more discrimination, and more fear. All Canadians should be protected from discrimination, and all Canadians should be free to speak out against all ideologies. M-103 is not serving either of those purposes.

In order for M-103 to both protect human beings and not protect any ideology, the term needs to be removed, clarified, or amended to "anti-Muslim bigotry".

There is a pervasive idea that those who are against the term "Islamophobia" are interested in seeing Muslims discriminated against. This assertion could not be more ludicrous. To loosely quote Christopher Hitchens, "There is a tendency...to think if someone in any way disagrees with [you] it must be for the lowest possible reason and if you found the lowest possible motive you have found the right one.

Those who accuse detractors of M-103 are doing exactly that. It is obviously a disgusting tactic aimed to silence us, but again, this is not new to me. I am accustomed to people using every tactic to try to silence me. My own mother threatened to kill me when I left Islam, but even that did not make me stop speaking my truth.

Ms. Chair, committee members, to reiterate, like most Canadians, I want all human beings to be protected and I will do everything in my power to facilitate this protection. I do not, however, want to extend this protection to ideas, as no ideas should ever be above scrutiny.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Mohammed.

We will now go to the question-and-answer section. This is a seven-minute section and the seven minutes include the question and answer, so I would ask everybody to be very mindful of the time because of time constraints. I will have to cut you off if you go over time.

I want to start with Mr. Virani, from the Liberals, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing before us, but specifically, Ms. Mohammed, thank you for having the courage to speak about your experiences.

I want to reiterate a clarification that's been made by many MPs at this committee that the motion has passed through the House. We're dealing with the study that is called for in the motion right now. But the point that needs to be made again and again is that certainly no Liberal member of this committee would do anything that would imperil section 2(b) and the right to freedom of expression that exists in this country. That's an important constitutional foundation and we all stand behind and support this.

AMPAC, specifically, you're from Alberta, and we haven't had a great number of witnesses from Alberta here. I want to ask you about four different things in my seven minutes.

The first would be the impact of the rise of anti-Muslim and Islamophobic sentiment in how you construe social media and media outlets, in particular, and their contribution to that rise in fomenting division.

Can you comment a little about Rebel Media, which sometimes has national scope but particularly has a bit of a western scope, including the province of Alberta, and how does that contribute one way or the other to the rise of the division we're seeing?

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: I'll start by saying how we've handled the situation. Historically in Edmonton, where we're both from, when the media is looking for stories about Muslims, about Islam, they generally go to the imam at the mosque. When we had AMPAC as an idea, at its inception we said the media should have a place to go where the spokesperson is not just representing themselves or their mosque, but people who can speak on behalf of the issues. That was one of the things. Now the media have a channel to go to for commentary on the news and stuff like that.

Certain media out there exploit the divisions, and the outlet you just mentioned has a tendency to do that. We've kept it very general and in a way when they go one way, we just keep it to the positive messages that we've been propagating and promoting this entire time, which is inclusion, living together in peace and tolerance, pluralism, and talking about the benefits of that type of society versus the society they promote and can propagate on their media channel.

For us, in our almost three years of existence, it's been a very positive experience in getting all Canadians together. It's not just about Muslims. We bring all minorities, all communities together, and we feel our efforts have paid off in spades.

● (1605)

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you for that. That informs some of our confusion on this side of the committee room, where we've had committee witnesses who regularly appear on the Rebel Media platform, notwithstanding the fact that most politicians have eschewed that platform, including the leader of the official opposition.

My next question is about collaboration, and I wanted to ask you this in two parts. Can you tell us a bit about collaboration? You talked about the Andalusian initiative in terms of promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding between different religious groups. We've also heard about this competing concern: at one time, in this country, we had grants that were made available for communities unto themselves—community capacity-building or community empowerment grants. Is there room for both aspects of that kind of discussion, promoting dialogue between communities, cultures, or religions, but also promoting community capacity unto itself?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri (President, Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council): In terms of our community outreach through our external affairs division of AMPAC, we've held many interfaith group meetings. For the Jewish community we have a group by the name of Salaam Shalom, where Muslim women and Jewish women come together and share stories and lifestyles. It creates an environment where they can share their stories and build some camaraderie and sisterhood. It takes away the barriers that would be in place today, Muslims against Jewish. It has never been the case before, but that's what that group does.

Similarly, we've done this as well for many Christian groups. The work we do with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights adopts the exact same approach, again, taking the message out and helping them understand what Muslims are and what Islam means, and taking away from the negative narrative the media can put out there.

In terms of our funding, the benefit that could be gained from funding these programs would be immense. The lack of funding that's been given out in the past for these programs, and the fact that they do not have any capacity to see these kind of impedes that building process that gradually can grow and bring these communities together.

Mr. Arif Virani: You mentioned your hotline, and this is something of a concern for us because we've heard from a number of witnesses about the under-reporting of hate crime incidents. They said there is a barrier to building up trust, sometimes, because of people's perceptions about law enforcement and people in authority, etc.

Can you explain to us a little more about the hotline? Do you feel there could be some collaboration and co-operation between government officials, using civil society groups for the aggregation of this kind of data, for accumulating the data, for standardizing the data and how it's collected, etc.?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: For sure.

The hotline itself, as Abe said in his recommendations, was a mechanism to provide support to Muslims if they felt uncomfortable telling their parents, their friends, or their brothers or sisters, or depending on what cultural background they came from. We know there are some people in our society who come from backgrounds where the trust in law enforcement has not been the greatest; they come from corrupt societies and whatnot.

Those kinds of stories come to us on the hotline, and they email us or they call us when they have something to report. They don't want to give their names; they just want to get this off their chest. Sometimes they call just to talk to someone, to understand what they've gone through. We're very proud of the fact that we've given them the support and also of the fact that we work quite closely with law enforcement, in this case, the Edmonton hate crime unit, where certain cases that we know and—

● (1610)

The Chair: Mr. Suri, can you wrap up that sentence, please?

Thank you.

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: —a lot of the cases go to law enforcement agencies in that sense.

Does that answer your question?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go now to Mr. Reid, for the Conservatives, for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

Just before I get to the questions, I want to make a suggestion to each of you. Two of the three groups of witnesses today indicated that they had written presentations. Professor, it's your power point presentation, and for the gentleman from Alberta, you said you'd be submitting something at a later date. We're getting pretty close to our deadline for getting evidence in, so you might want to ask the clerk about getting stuff in as soon as possible, as opposed to letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

I would like to start with Professor Achab. You made reference to Kathleen Harris having a series of definitions of Islamophobia that she had pulled, I guess, from different organizations. I was trying to find that online after you said it, and couldn't. Do you have a source that you can provide us with for that?

Prof. Karim Achab: Yes, certainly. The text is still online. I have the URL address, so I can provide it to you if you wish.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. If you could provide that to the clerk, it would be distributed to all members of the committee. Thank you very much.

Professor, you talked about the term Islamophobia being problematic, I think, for the same reason.... You didn't say this, but I think it's true: it's a version of the Platonic theory of forms. We say there's something out there called “Islamophobia”, the same way that Plato says there's something out there conceptually called “table”, and then we see whether or not it is a table by seeing whether it conforms with that pre-existing perfection. It's a really bad way of trying to find useful concepts you can work with. Is that a reasonable, abstract way of describing what the problem is here?

Prof. Karim Achab: The problem here is that there is something wrong in the mental representation of Islam among Canadian citizens. It means it doesn't match what's happening in the real world. That's not the case. The fear is completely justified, and it matches what is happening in the real world. It's legitimate for people to be scared and afraid, but that's not phobia. That's not a form of phobia.

Also, one thing we tend to ignore, or to neglect a bit, is that there is some activism inside all this. In the Quran, Muslims are not only encouraged to be faithful and to have faith, but they are also encouraged to be more active—to be proactive and go to other places and travel and immigrate in order to spread this ideology. There is something to be done here in order to disentangle this ideology. This is being asked of the Muslims, and the source is taken directly from the Quran, which is considered the word of Allah. If Allah is asking them to go to places around the world and spread this ideology, and you as a member of Parliament are asking them to stop, who do you think they will listen to?

Mr. Scott Reid: There's nothing wrong with people who are Muslims wanting to go somewhere else and possibly convert others to their faith, any more than it would be for any member of any other faith to do the same thing. You'd agree with me on that, wouldn't you?

Prof. Karim Achab: That is true, but there is a continuum that goes from the jihadists on one hand, and on the other hand the activists in the political organizations or even non-government organizations—the politicians and human rights activists and all these words. There is something like a distribution growth. I'm not saying it is explicit, but it is implicit. Everybody's taking care of their own role.

A jihadist is here to kill, and the other one is here to justify—to wrap up in a very nice phrase what the killing is about, in order to find special circumstances. Then, if someone is put in jail when they're done with their job, their task is over and someone steps in. Now we know they're going to take care of this person who was put in jail because he did this crime.

There is this continuous chain, where the distribution of roles is perfect.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have so little time. I'm sorry but I have to move on to another witness.

Ms. Mohammed, I've read parts of your book that were online. Initially I wasn't sure. In fact, I stopped to ask this question. It read as if it was a fictionalized account of your life, but it's actually the real story of your life. Is that correct?

● (1615)

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed: That's correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Wow. Thank you.

Motion 103 starts with the assertion that there is an increasing public climate of hate and fear. Forget about the StatsCan stuff, but if we measure it by the fact that the worst case of religious-based murder in this country in 30 years took place earlier this year, there would be a case for that. You're presenting something that is quite different in your comments. I wonder if you could explain that.

I'm aware that now you are not wearing a hijab anymore, so that may change how people perceive or see you. Anyway, could you elaborate on that comment you made earlier about Canadians being welcoming?

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed: Canadians are incredibly welcoming, sometimes to a fault. I mentioned my being from the Muslim world and the fact that none of this is new to me. In the Muslim world, we have a lot of laws against the niqab, for example. There are a lot of restrictions on the niqab in Egypt, Qatar, Morocco—all over the Muslim world. It would never be an issue over there because everybody understands right away that this is a safety issue. When that same issue is brought up in the western world, in a western country, then the question becomes, “Are we being racist? Are we being Islamophobic?” All of a sudden, everybody is really careful not to offend anybody.

That's what I mean when I say it's to a fault. Safety comes first. We have been very comfortable over here, but over in the Muslim world they're not. They deal with Islamists—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed: There are Muslims, there are Islamists, and there are jihadis. There is no confusion among those three groups if you speak to anybody from the Muslim world. The confusion happens here, in the western world, where people see all three groups as Muslims.

Mr. Scott Reid: That is the problem with the word “Islamophobia” in a nutshell, then.

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed: Correct. The word “Islamophobia” is dealing with the religion itself; it's not talking about the different kinds of people. Muslims, of course, are just average Muslims. Within Muslims, you're going to have Islamists and jihadis, who are also Muslims. Islamists, as Karim was describing, are people who are more political, like the Muslim Brotherhood, for example. The Muslim Brotherhood is deemed a terrorist organization in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and many other Islamic countries, because it is a terrorist organization, but it is not deemed a terrorist organization in the west, because we don't see it that way. We have to catch up over here.

We can look at how the Muslim world has been dealing with this problem for so many years. We can look at the mistakes they've made and the good things they've done, and learn from what they have been doing and how they have been dealing with this problem, because none of this is new. What's happening is that we are trying to reinvent the wheel, and we are trying to reinvent the wheel from a place of open hearts and open minds. We are so over-concerned about offending people—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Yasmine Mohammed: —that we are losing sight of the fact that safety is more important.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Thank you very much.

We go to Jenny Kwan, for the New Democrats, for seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you to all the witnesses.

My question is for the representatives of the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council, if I may begin there.

In your presentation, you gave us a very stark example of an incident that occurred. From that perspective, I am interested to see how we can address these issues—the issue around reporting and the hotline issue that was touched on—in a more practical way. Others have come to this committee to suggest that perhaps utilizing NGOs on the ground, which are close to the community, might create a comfort zone for people to come forward. I'd like you to expand on that, if you could, in terms of recommendations for action.

Related to that piece, I am also very aware of the situation of women, in particular, and how difficult it is for them to come forward. We had other presentations, from other witnesses, on that score. I wonder if you can expand on that issue.

Lastly, on the question around a national strategy, if you will, to address the issue of racism, discrimination, and religious discrimination, would you see, within that plan, the importance of government-funded strategies for NGOs to work in collaboration with all levels of government to address the issue of discrimination?

● (1620)

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: I'll start with our hotline, which you alluded to. That served as a major tool for us to see what's really going on, on the ground. We can talk about Islamophobia and we can talk about discrimination, but we don't really know until we actually measure it. This has served us well in terms of how much of it is happening and with what frequency it is happening, as well as what kind of discrimination has been occurring in the province. The two examples I gave you were just mere examples, two trends, but in terms of what we can offer you as a deliverable, we can parse out those 400 calls and provide you with qualitative trends as to what has been happening. Women are being targeted, which is an obvious one that you mentioned, as well as newcomers, but there are other trends as well that we can take from that and provide to you, as a committee, to give you a good sense of what types of discrimination are occurring and how they can be addressed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can I just pause there and ask you a question? Of the 400 calls that you've collected from the hotline, how many have been successfully prosecuted?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: There have been about 60 incidents that were reported to law enforcement agencies, with the Edmonton Police Service hate crime unit. Each and every one of them that could be perceived as a hate crime has been looked into. This is where, in our recommendations, we allude to section 318 of the Criminal Code, where there is some ambiguity in terms of what determines a hate crime. People don't understand that. We want to work on that to help them understand the fact that when you report an incident.... There is the case of a gentleman holding a noose and pointing it to two hijabi women, and singing the national anthem. To us, that's a problem. It's a problem to me as a Canadian, as an Edmontonian, and as an Albertan, yet there was no charge.

Again, the goal is to eliminate the confusion about what this is and to help you understand, and then see what we can do about that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Were any of the cases successfully charged?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: I believe about five of them have been.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's five out of the 400. Thank you.

Please, carry on.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: I'll address the rest of your questions.

There has been, from our perspective, a very positive development where people do trust certain NGOs. They have trust issues with law enforcement—I think Faisal alluded to that earlier—so they are willing to use us as a liaison. We don't replace 911. We emphasize that we don't replace law enforcement, but we can serve as a bridge. That's what we are.

We've worked with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, which is also based in Edmonton. The Alberta Federation of Labour is also very supportive of our initiatives, as is, of course, law enforcement itself. We've worked with many organizations, not just Muslim organizations but mainstream organizations. Organizations of other faiths have worked with us, because, in the end, we are all in this together. Discrimination is not limited to Muslims, and that's something that we want to address, as well.

The Chair: You have two minutes, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: What about the national plan?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: Our goal was always to make sure that we solidify a proper foundational process internally, a consistent process, and then roll that out. We are in the midst of creating some synergies and collaborating with other organizations to make this a national plan. As Mr. Virani alluded to, we need to gather qualitative data, put it together, make some sense out of it, and then drive strategic planning around it. That's what we are working on right now. Hopefully in 2018 we will have something coming out.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's not to say that we shouldn't have a national strategy in the meantime, until that data is collected, because there are many other things we can do even without sufficient data.

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: Right. The hotline was just a start. Again, we need to create more and more mechanisms where we can eradicate this misunderstanding of the term “Islamophobia” and help educate people.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On the question of resourcing, should the federal government do this as a national plan, and thus resource across the country in collaboration with NGOs to get this work done?

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Absolutely.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Ms. Kwan, if you want to use them.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, I do.

In terms of the process, an accountability mechanism, a reporting mechanism within the national plan would be essential as well, so that we can report back to the community about what has been done and get feedback to improve the plan, adjust the plan, and resource the plan to move forward.

● (1625)

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Yes, it's one of those exercises where we have to keep going back to see what data is updated and then use that data to look at new ways to address issues. The data is always changing, and you can always come back to it. It's an evolving thing, so you have to keep improving your processes, improving the solutions, and finding new ways to solve problems. Discrimination is one of those things that are always evolving, always changing, and the challenges are always different. You have to keep up with it to eventually eliminate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will go to Anju Dhillon, from the Liberals, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

My questions will be mostly for the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council.

Since the creation of your association, have you seen a decrease in hate crimes based on religion or race?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: We've definitely seen a rise in awareness, and that is one of our biggest goals. There is a rise in the educational sessions that we hold to eliminate and eradicate any misunderstandings they've come to. We understand the fact that we are talking about a phobia—not to take away, respectfully, in terms of the terminology that we have come up with here in the committee hearings today. People who have arachnophobia just have a fear of spiders.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Right.

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: That's what it is. We are not going too much into the terminology of what it really is, or whether they are crazy folk or not. It's just a fear of spiders, and you help them understand that these are just spiders. We are trying to help people understand the fact that we are just Muslims, and that our religion is about peace, love, and harmony. People who come from different cultures do not dictate or define the religion. You could be a bad person as a person alone; you don't have to belong to a certain religion. There are bad people in every single religion out there. There is not one religion that does not have a bad person in it. It does not mean that this religion is bad.

Again, for us, it's about education. It's about awareness and driving that awareness, and we are seeing that increase, absolutely. In that sense, we are seeing a decrease in terms of hate. We see it every day, and it's happening now.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Do you work with other organizations?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: Absolutely. As I said, it's always going to be a collaborative effort. It's the way it can be. Again, in Alberta we collaborate with other organizations. On the national side of it, we do that as well.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Such as other religious organizations...?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: That's right. We've done it with the Jewish community, the Christian faith communities. That's what we are doing, absolutely, to break down the barriers.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: We've worked closely with the Mennonite centre on the Syrian refugee crisis. We have continued to work with the Sikh community, because they suffer. Sometimes we forget that they are also one of the main victims of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is not just discrimination against Muslims; it's discrimination against people who are perceived as Muslims, which is a form of racism. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in North America, in the west, are people of colour, so it does become a racist phobia.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Is that what you meant in your testimony, that they are perceived as Muslims?

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Yes. It is based on physical characteristics. I could be perceived as a Muslim but not be a Muslim, and still be a victim of Islamophobia.

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: I second that. I want to bring to your attention an incident in Bashaw, Alberta. A Sikh owned a motel. It was burned down, and a death occurred, just because there was ignorance and no understanding of whether this person was a Muslim or not. He was a Sikh, a turban-wearing Sikh.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: How do we fight this ignorance, whether it's about religious symbols that Sikhs wear or somebody's skin tone?

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: Again, it comes down to education and awareness. It comes down to understanding who we are as people. We are opening up our doors or mosques and welcoming our neighbourhood members to let them understand who we are and what we do. We are just your everyday people who pay their taxes. We are doctors, engineers, technologists, and accountants. We are just normal people. There's nothing different.

The people who commit these jihadi crimes do not define us. We do not associate them with Islam, because, again, they don't belong to a religion.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: How do we reach out to those people who are committing hate crimes or heinous acts, like putting up hateful posters in a university? Do you reach out to that organization and try to bridge...?

● (1630)

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Absolutely. Edmonton just had its municipal election not too long ago. There was a potential candidate who was espousing anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim rhetoric on her Facebook page, and we found it. We didn't react negatively. We called her and said, “Hey, we noticed that this is happening. What do you have to say? Why are you putting this stuff up on your Facebook page”? She apologized. She said, “Well, you know what....” We took her to the mosque and showed her around.

What you have to do is battle ignorance. When this happens, half the time it's people not knowing. It's people relying on what they see on TV.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: It's fear of the unknown.

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Exactly. Once they get to know the unknown, you find that they are willing to talk to you and treat you like a normal, everyday person. It's really about battling ignorance. That's what we find. That's what we are trying to do. I alluded to the Andalusian curriculum. The reason we are doing this is not that we have an obsession with Spain, necessarily, but that it was a period in history when Muslims, Christians, and Jews were living together in peaceful coexistence, and that's what we want to promote.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Could you please submit the Andalusian curriculum to this committee?

Mr. Aurangzeb Qureshi: Sure.

The Chair: You have about one minute left, Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: I'm glad to hear that you have a hotline. I think those help. As soon as somebody has a problem, you just pick up the phone and call. Since the hotline, have you had a lot of people come to your office? Is there somewhere they can come in and get psychological or legal help? We heard throughout the testimony that it's very hard for some people to go and get legal help. They are afraid of their rights. Newly arrived immigrants think they are going to get deported if they go to the police, because of the reality back where they came from.

Mr. Faisal Khan Suri: Those who answer the calls on our hotline are professional individuals. They are psychologists, lawyers, and whatnot. These calls are strictly confidential, for privacy reasons. Even I don't get the full context of it, because I am not supposed to know what it is. Arrangements are made with the individual in terms of any support that is given: a one-on-one meeting, a discussion over the phone, or further touchpoints they would have throughout the period until they are fully supported, from either law enforcement or mental health perspective.

As I said, whatever arrangements happen, they happen between the individual professional and the victim on that side of it. Individuals within AMPAC are not supposed to be aware of this because of confidentiality reasons. We treat it just like a doctor-patient relationship, and that's where it remains.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhillon and Mr. Suri. I'm sorry, the seven minutes are up.

We've finished our questions.

Yes, David.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Chair, one point would be to remind the witnesses that if they want to send in any further recommendations or information, we'd be happy to include that as part of the testimony.

The Chair: I was about to say that.

Please do it as quickly as possible. This committee is going to be wrapping up very soon for its report, so if you can send any information you have to the clerk, he will distribute it to the committee so we will all get to read it—but ASAP. Thank you.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming and for spending time explaining their perspectives on this report.

I will now ask to suspend, so that we can get the other group to come in. Thank you.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: If you'll allow, I will now call the meeting to order.

Again, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee is studying systemic racism and religious discrimination. Today we have Statistics Canada as our witness, Mr. Clermont and Ms. Kong.

I'll just run over the protocols for you. You have 10 minutes between you to present to us, and then of course there will be questions and answers.

To remind the members, we will finish this with 15 minutes for our in-camera session to discuss the committee report.

Mr. Clermont.

Mr. Yvan Clermont (Director, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada): Very good. Thank you, Madame Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, everyone.

First, let me thank the committee members for inviting me to present the most recent data on hate crimes reported by Canadians and by Canadian police services.

[*English*]

The most recent statistics we have are police-reported data from the calendar year 2015, which were released last June. In an effort to produce more timely data, the committee should know that the 2016 statistics will be released this November 28.

I'm here today, accompanied by Rebecca Kong, chief of police services program, also from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics at Statistics Canada. She leads the uniform crime reports survey, from which most data presented today are coming from, among other surveys in the field of policing.

[*Translation*]

In summary, the results we are going to discuss today show first that Canada is a very diverse society—and will become increasingly diverse in the coming years—and second that hate crimes reported by Canadians represent one criminal incident out of 20, according to the survey on victimization.

Between 2014 and 2015, incidents of hate crimes reported by the police increased from 1,295 to 1,362. Certain groups saw greater increases. For example, in 2015, the number of incidents involving the Arab and West Asian population increased from 69 to 92 incidents and incidents involving the Muslim population increased from 99 to 159 incidents. I am still talking about incidents reported to the police.

[*English*]

To start with, I'd like to present some recent census data which will help contextualize this presentation.

[*Translation*]

According to the results of the 2016 census, more than one person out of every five in Canada are foreign-born, a total of 7.5 million people, of whom a number have arrived in recent years. More than two million, in fact, have arrived in the last 10 years.

[*English*]

The Philippines is now the top source country of recent immigration in Canada. It is followed by India and China. Of note, people born in Syria are now also part of the top 10 countries of origin of recent immigrants due to the recent influx of Syrian refugees.

The census data highlights the high degree of diversity in Canada. According to our projections, these trends are expected to continue over the next two decades. It is projected that by 2036, three in 10 Canadians will be foreign-born, and the same proportion will have a mother tongue other than French or English. High fertility will contribute to increase the proportion of aboriginal people in the population as well. Aboriginal youth, for example, represent a relatively large proportion of Canadian youth, and this will continue to grow.

Statistics Canada has two sources of data on hate crime: data on self-reported victimization and police-reported information. The first source is the general social survey—victimization, which is collected every five years, and which was last conducted in 2014. This is about self-reported criminal incidents of various natures. The second source of information reported is what is reported by Canadians to the police, then to Statistics Canada by the police themselves. This is done every year through the uniform crime report.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Let us first look at the results of the general social survey on victimization, which is conducted every five years.

For that survey, a sample of Canadians 15 years of age and over is asked whether they have been victims of certain crimes such as sexual assault, robbery, assault, or vandalism. If the respondents indicate they have been victims of those crimes, they are asked whether they believe that the incident was motivated by hate. If so, they are then asked what the reason for that hatred is.

In 2014, Canadians reported 330,000 criminal incidents that they believed to be motivated by hate. This represented 5% of all incidents reported, or one incident of every 20. The data also revealed that two-thirds of those reporting that they had been victims of an incident motivated by hate did not report it to the police.

Now let us go to the incidents reported to the police. First, it is important to define a hate crime. police data use strict legal criteria, as applied to cases that have been confirmed as a result of a police investigation.

[*English*]

Hate crimes include any Criminal Code incidents that involved one of the four specific offences of hate crimes listed in the Criminal Code. These include advocating genocide, public incitement of hatred, willful promotion of hatred, and mischief motivated by hate in relation to religious property. Police-reported hate crime also includes all other incidents where an offence was motivated by hate, as determined by the police.

On slide 8 of your deck now, you can see that the hate crimes rose by 5% in Canada in 2015. This was largely due to an increase in incidents targeting the Muslim population and Arab or west Asian populations. Police reported 1,362 incidents of that nature, which was 67 more than the year before. Of note though, in comparison, there were almost 1.9 million criminal incidents reported to the police in that same year.

On slide 9, the number of police-reported crimes motivated by hatred, race, or ethnicity grew from 611 incidents to 641, an increase of 30 incidents, or 5%. Close to half of all hate crimes reported to the police in 2015 were motivated by hate of a race or ethnicity. Police reported 469 incidents in 2015 that were motivated by hatred of a religion. That was 40 more incidents than the previous year. These incidents accounted for another 35% of hate-motivated crimes in that year. Hate crimes targeting sexual orientation declined by 9%, which was down to 141 incidents. These incidents accounted for another 11% of hate crimes.

On slide 10, hate crime incidents are considered as violent or non-violent. Examples of violent crimes are assaults and uttering threats, which are the most common types of violent offences related to hate. The most common non-violent hate crime was mischief, which includes vandalism and graffiti. This was the most common offence targeting a religion or ethnicity. Incidents motivated by hatred of sexual orientation in 2015 were more likely to be violent, almost 60% of them. This was followed by those incidents motivated by hatred of race or ethnicity, at 55%.

Now I'll move on to slide 11. Since 2010, black populations have been the most targeted group for these incidents. However, the total number of incidents targeting this group has decreased since 2012. Still, in 2015 police-reported incidents motivated by hate against the black population accounted for 35% of racial hate crimes. In contrast, police-reported hate crimes targeting Arab or west Asian populations have been on the rise since 2013. In 2014, there were 69 hate crimes against this group, and that number went to 92 incidents in 2015. Those incidents accounted for 14% of hate crimes motivated by race or ethnicity.

On slide 12, other groups targeted in 2015 include white populations at 6% and aboriginal populations at 5%. There were 35 police-reported hate crimes targeting aboriginal populations in 2015. These incidents have been relatively low.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

The increase in the total number of hate crimes in 2015 was attributable in part to an increase in the number of cases targeting Muslims. The number of hate crimes against Muslims reported to the police increased from 99 to 159, an increase of 61%.

At the same time, the number of hate crimes targeting Jews decreased from 213 in 2014 to 178 in 2015. So, hate crimes against the Jewish population is still the largest number, but the number was followed very closely by crimes targeting the Muslim population.

[*English*]

On slide 14, as you can see, there is an interesting pattern to be observed in relation to the age of the accused. In 2015, youths aged 12 to 17 accounted for 22% of all persons accused in police-reported hate crimes. This is consistent with what was reported the previous year. The majority of those accused of committing hate crimes, 87%, were male. Young males under the age of 25 made up more than a third of all persons accused of hate crimes.

We are on slide 15 now. Persons accused of hate-motivated crimes targeting religion were even younger, which is in line with what was observed in previous years. About half of those accused of hate crimes targeting religion were 24 years old or younger.

Finally, in the age profile on slide 16, you can see that persons accused of hate crimes targeting race or ethnicity tended to be older than those targeting religion. In 2015, 63% were aged 25 or older.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, that concludes my presentation today.

I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their attention and their time.

My colleague Ms. Kong and I are available to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I want to thank you for coming, because so much of what we heard from witnesses in the past focused on the lack of statistical data, disaggregated data, etc. We thought that having you here to walk us through some of this would be very important.

We are going to go through a seven-minute round, and that includes question and answer. The first questioner is Ms. Dabrusin, for the Liberals.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you.

It was helpful to work through these slides, but most of my questions are going to come from your last report. When I was looking at it, I had many questions about how we get to the numbers that we just looked at.

If I look at some of the notes in the report.... It says, “Changes in reporting practices [from the police] can have an effect on hate crime statistics.” It also refers to the fact that, given the small number of incidents as a whole, “a few incidents can have a considerable impact” on these statistics.

My first question for you is, how do we set the baselines year to year? When we are looking at, say, the 2016 statistics that are going to come out, how should we interpret the existing statistics we have?

● (1650)

Mr. Yvan Clermont: That's a good question.

Ms. Rebecca Kong (Chief, Policing Services Program, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada): We always caution in the report that reporting can vary from year to year. We know that there are a lot of factors that can influence that. These are incidents that are reported by victims to the police, and we know that not all incidents are reported to the police. We have seen in the past—particularly in the earlier days, when police services were setting up hate crime units or doing particular outreach to certain communities—that this could influence whether the numbers go up or down. That's the answer to your first question.

In terms of baseline, it is difficult. The numbers are small. As you saw, in 2015 we had a total of 1,300 hate crimes, compared to over a million total crimes reported by police. We do have to caution that small fluctuations from year to year can turn into large percentage increases.

Often, when we are looking at the characteristics of victims or the accused, we try to pool the data to have a larger number, but essentially these are administrative data. These are the numbers. They are not estimates; they are the numbers that are coming from the police, and it's important to take the context when interpreting them.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I noticed that even in the 2015 data, there wasn't detailed information available from the municipal police services in Calgary, Quebec, and Saint John.

One recommendation that has come from a number of witnesses is to develop a uniform standard for collecting data. I was wondering if you had any suggestions as to how that might look and how that might work.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: The data that are reported in *Juristat* are based on the uniform crime reporting survey. The collection of data on hate-motivated crime was developed in order to collect standard information, in terms of what police determine as an incident, how they count an incident, and what information they are to take into consideration when classifying a hate crime. The categories and the definition of a hate crime that we use are standard across all police services. Where we note that police services are not reporting, it is because they haven't transitioned to the newest version of the survey, which has the module on hate crime. That is why they don't provide detailed information.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Will they be included for 2016?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: They don't provide the detail, but they provide the incident. We know if there has been an incident, and the nature of the incident. We just don't have details about....

Ms. Rebecca Kong: The victim and the accused....

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Are the three going to be included in the 2016 one, with this detailed information?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Calgary has converted over, so we will have them. Quebec has not, yet. Saint John has transitioned over as well.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Would you be able to give us the uniform standards that you say they are all abiding by? If we can have that in writing, that would be helpful for us.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Absolutely.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I want to jump quickly to one other piece. We have a lot to cover.

The data from the general social survey on Canadians' safety, on victimization, differs from what is reported by the police because it is coming from the victims. Two-thirds of the individuals in the last survey who said they had been victims of hate-motivated crimes had not reported the incidents to the police.

Did you have a follow-up question as part of that about why they had not reported to the police?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes, we did. We also compared it with non-hate crime to see if there was a comparison or differences. For most reasons that are brought forward or proposed to the respondents when they are being asked, the distribution is about the same for hate crimes and non-hate crimes.

The two bigger differences we saw were the fear of revenge, which was higher among victims of hate crimes, and the fear that the police would be biased, which was another area where the prevalence was higher among the victims of hate crimes compared to victims of non-hate crimes.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: If we were looking at how we could improve the quality of the data we are gathering on hate crimes, what would be your suggestions as to how we can improve our collection of that information, from the victims as well as from police services?

● (1655)

Mr. Yvan Clermont: I'm going to give a brief summary of this, and I would invite my colleague, Madam Kong, to supply more information about that.

I believe that, with time and with all the mechanisms in place with the police forces in order to report through the uniform crime report.... The standards are given. There is training online. There is data validation that goes with them, individually, when we find there are big differences from year to year. There is a big process of data certification that goes with police forces. I would think that the mechanisms in place are very good at the moment, especially for an administrative data survey.

Of course, there may be room for improvement to that, but there is sensitivity from the respondents' side and a lot of interaction between the people working on the survey and the respondents. I think that what is in place is pretty good, but if there are other ways of improving it, I would ask Madam Kong to supply information about that.

The Chair: Perhaps Ms. Kong can provide information when another person asks her a question, because we have finished the seven-minute round here.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Or in writing, if no one else asks....

The Chair: I now go to Mr. Anderson, who is sharing with Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: I'll go first, Madam Chair, if you don't mind. I just have a couple of quick questions.

How long have you been collecting data from law enforcement agencies in regard to hate crime?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: We started collecting in 2005. The survey was developed in the early 2000s, under the national action plan against racism at the time.

It was developed in 2005, and police services came on gradually as they rolled into the newest version of the survey.

Mr. David Sweet: So you have had varying degrees of vigour and compliance in regard to collecting. Is there any kind of incentive for them to comply?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Typically, the way it works in terms of collecting the uniform crime reporting survey data is that the new versions are implemented in their records management system, the automated system they use to input their records. When they upgrade to the next version of that with their vendor, they will get the new requirements for the survey. Essentially, that was the impetus behind when police services would switch.

Mr. David Sweet: I think that even one hate incident or crime is appalling and we should do the best we can to prevent that, but I want to make sure that in our quest to prevent that we also make sure our language is appropriate.

In this motion, we have the terminology of rising “climate of hate and fear”. I am looking at your numbers here in regard to hate crimes from 2009 to 2015, and I am looking at the population of Canada, which has risen by about two million. Do you see any evidence of a rising climate of hate and fear in those numbers?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Accounting for the population, the rates are relatively low. The overall fluctuations year to year are not great, but we have seen differences in terms of particular groups—some of the differences that Mr. Clermont identified in the slides in terms of shifting targets for hate-motivated crimes.

Mr. David Sweet: I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to follow up on that. We do have this “increasing public climate of hate and fear” as one of the assumptions of the report. How would you statistically determine something like that? How do you determine something systemic—such as that we have an increasing public climate of fear—or do you not go into that area? Do you just report the numbers and then it's up to policy-makers to make the declaration?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: I would say—in addition to what Madam Kong said in answering Mr. Sweet's question—that the uniform crime report collects only data about what has been recognized as a crime. This is not the right vehicle to measure fear or to measure hate if the hate is not a crime, per se. There would need to be other statistical vehicles to do that. Maybe the best way to do it is to use a general social survey, for example, and have some questions about tolerance.

● (1700)

Mr. David Anderson: Then you would have people report whether they felt others were tolerant or intolerant, and that would be your determination of whether the climate has changed.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: It could be on both sides. This would be one means that could be explored. I don't have a definite answer to that, but this could be an avenue to explore.

Mr. David Anderson: Is that how you've done the self-reported numbers that you have, through the self-surveys? I just want to read this, because it caught my attention: In 2014, we had almost 1,000 criminal incidents per day where people believed something happened to them that was motivated by hate. Is that correct?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: That's 20% of all criminal incidents, so we have 6.5 million criminal incidents per year in Canada, approximately. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Well, this is what the respondents have been reporting.

Mr. David Anderson: Do they report 6.5 million?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: Out of that 1,000 per day, we end up with 1,300 for the entire year that are carried through at the legal level of police reporting hate crimes and, I assume, taking them into the justice system.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: You could interpret that as such.

Mr. David Anderson: How else would you interpret it? I am asking you, because it's your numbers. Out of the 330,000 incidents that people feel were motivated by hate last year, 1,362 were actually acted on.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: Is there some discrepancy there?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Of those 330,000 cases where people said they believed that hate was a motive for the crime—there could have been other motives as well, but hate was one of the motives they could have chosen—two-thirds never made it to the police. Of the one third, we don't know what happened to those cases, because we didn't follow them up expressly. The only thing we know is that, when we look at the measure of what is being reported to the police, we get only 1,300 cases from the police.

Mr. David Anderson: Are you suggesting that 110,000 are reported to the police but only 1,300 end up being reported from them?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: I wouldn't go as far as making that conclusion.

Only 1,300 get substantiated by the police as being hate crimes, but that is a different source. These are two different things.

Mr. David Anderson: One source is the person's individual opinion. The other source is the police.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes. It is what gets reported to the police and what gets substantiated by the police after an investigation.

Mr. David Anderson: This is similar to Mr. Sweet's question. When you see a straight line—from 1,482 in 2009, it goes down to 1,332, then up to 1,414, and ends at 1,362—do you see that as an increasing rate, when the population has gone up by almost two million?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: There was a 5% increase in the numbers from 2014 to 2015. There hasn't been a 5% increase in the population in one year, so it's a 5% increase in the number of incidents.

Mr. David Anderson: Actually, I think you're wrong, because from 2013 to 2014 it went up that much, and from 2012 to 2013 it went down more than that. You're the statistician here, but it went from 1,414 in 2012 to 1,167 in 2013. That drop is far greater than when it went up. I'm not arguing about it. I'm just—

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Are you talking about the...?

Mr. David Anderson: This is slide 8. We are in the same range as in 2009. We are actually still below 2009 and 2010. We are just above 2011, but below 2012.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: Is that an increase? There are two million more people.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Sorry, I was referring to the increase in the last year of data, from 2014 to 2015, which amounts to 5%. You are right, though. There was a decrease after 2009.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Clermont.

David, we've gone well over the seven minutes.

I will go to Ms. Kwan, for seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you to our officials for this report.

Two-thirds of the victims did not report the incident to the police. Is that number across the board for the different provinces? Is there any significant difference between provinces and territories in terms of not reporting to the police, or is it pretty well across the board that about two-thirds of the incidents in each of the provinces and territories are not reported to the police?

● (1705)

Ms. Rebecca Kong: We don't have that information with us. We would have to provide that to the committee.

The Chair: Could you, please?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I am curious to see a province-by-province and territory-by-territory comparison, to see whether any province stands out, or whether everybody is not reporting, across the board. Likewise, I am interested to know.... The package that we received gives a year-by-year breakdown of the number of incidents, and there are some years when the numbers jump significantly in a particular province, almost double. If we look at those years in comparison to the demographic changes or immigration trends, I am wondering whether anything would jump out to show us that something unique is happening there, or whether these things are just randomly happening.

I gather you don't have that level of detail here with you.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: No, I don't.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If we could get that, I would be very interested to know the year-to-year comparison of all the different provinces and territories, and to see how the demographics may have shifted—whether there was an increase of a particular ethnicity in that province for that year, or anything like that. That would be very useful and helpful.

I guess with all this information.... This is the information you don't collect; I'm not sure if you do. Of the cases that were reported, do you have any data on how many were not just reported but prosecuted, and the outcome of that prosecution? Do you have that information as well?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: No, we don't have that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You don't gather it at all.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: No.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's all within the police's domain.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In terms of reporting, you have the gender analysis as well. Am I reading this chart right? This is the chart where you have it broken down by age and gender, and then by ethnicity, religion, and orientation. Is that the number of the persons accused?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: This is the table.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes, it's the accused.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you have the same breakdown of reporting as well, of the cases that are reported? I'm curious to know how many of them are women, for example.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Do you mean in terms of the victims?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: We have victim information for violent violations, which we can provide as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is that for hate crimes?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Yes. When I say “violent violations”.... In the uniform crime reporting survey, we collect victim information only if the violation is a violent one, not if it's a property one, so for violent hate crimes, we'll have that for you.

Mr. Arif Virani: Can you specify which table you're talking about, Jenny?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm looking at table 2. It's for the accused, but I'm wondering if we can get a similar kind of information for victims so that we get a sense of who the victims are from that perspective.

With people saying they are not comfortable with reporting.... You have information about the reasons why people don't report. Is there a distinction with age and gender, or is that across the board?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: We would have to look at the data that way. We just did it overall, for all victims, in terms of the reasons for not reporting.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. I wonder if the committee could get that information as well.

I'm sorry. I'm getting down to this level of detail because it would paint a picture for us to see what that situation looks like. If we are going to try to come up with solutions for getting people to report, then we have to be sensitive to that information. Hopefully that will inform us accordingly.

Actually, Madam Chair, these are all the questions I have in terms of the level of detail that I am looking for to help me better understand what these statistics mean.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Now we go to Mr. Vandal, for the Liberals.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I am trying to unpack some of the numbers I've heard here, so please bear with me.

Before I get there, do you collect any data on hate crime from other sectors of the criminal justice system, whether it's the courts system or the corrections system?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: For the four offences in the Criminal Code, we do have that information in the court data.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What sort of data would you collect?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: We would collect information about the characteristics of the accused, about the time it took to process the case in court, and about the decision of the trial, just to name a few types of information that we could have on that.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I am looking at page 5 of your presentation. There are two ways of collecting hate crime data. One is through the household survey, which is self-reported. The other is through police-reported stats.

Obviously, it is not necessary for a charge to be laid by the police department in order to collect the data you are looking for. Are you following me?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: I'm not sure I understood the question, sorry.

Mr. Dan Vandal: It's a household survey. It could be that somebody was threatened; it could be that it was a real threat but a charge was not laid. Would that still qualify as a hate crime stat?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: If the respondent said so, yes, it would.

Mr. Dan Vandal: As opposed to police-reported statistics, where I'm assuming a charge is laid....

Mr. Yvan Clermont: They receive a complaint, and then they lay a charge.

Mr. Dan Vandal: The police investigate, and there is a charge.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: Just to correct that, they may not lay a charge if they haven't found someone to charge, but the police data represent substantiated incidents that have been investigated.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What is the difference between your uniform crime reporting survey and the integrated criminal court survey?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: The integrated criminal court survey is an administrative database or data gathering from all provincial courts and superior courts in the country—only about the characteristics of the case and of the accused, and the decision being rendered at the end, when the case is completed.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay, and the uniform crime reporting survey is what we have here, essentially.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: It's the police-level data, so it's everything the police respond to and it is substantiated by the police, regardless of whether or not they've found someone to charge, and regardless of whether or not it goes to court.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What can we do to improve the data system you're working with now? Do you have any suggestions for us as a government as to what we can do better?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: I think this picks up on the other committee member's comment. Monsieur Clermont already commented a bit on what we do to validate the police-reported data. In terms of training police, we have online training for them to be able to understand how to correctly score the data, etc., and as we see from these numbers, a lot of the information is based on the willingness of people to come forward and report to police. We have seen in the past that when there are community outreach programs, numbers tend to go up.

I think in terms of working with police, continuing to sensitize them to the importance of the data, and training them, we find that it makes a big difference when a police service has a hate crime unit and has strong relationships with communities in terms of the willingness of victims to come forward. That's where we'll get information on the numbers.

The other aspect in which maybe there is a gap is that we know a lot about victims from the victimization survey, but we don't know a lot about offenders and what motivates them to commit these crimes. There is a gap in information in that respect, of understanding the thinking behind offenders' behaviour and why they may commit the crimes that they commit.

● (1715)

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I believe Julie Dzerowicz has some questions.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you. I'm just going to continue—

The Chair: Keep it to two minutes though, Julie, or I'll cut you off.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's okay. Don't you worry.

One of the recommendations is about whether data could actually be collected by community-based organizations. Could you apply a uniform crime reporting survey to community-based organizations in the same way that you do to the police?

I can see why a lot of people within organizations across the country wouldn't go to the police. There are different reasons. There are different cultures in different cities and different places. I wonder whether StatsCan has ever used a uniform crime reporting survey, the same model from the police but with community-based organizations?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Rebecca Kong: In the past we have collected data from organizations such as those related to victim services to fill gaps in information. It's not unheard of for StatsCan to work with non-profit organizations or community-based organizations in data collection.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's possible.

Mr. Yvan Clermont: It is possible. I was going to say exactly the same thing. We have the transition home survey as well, so it's a possibility.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: If you were going to collect data on offenders, how would you go about doing that? What would be your recommendation?

Ms. Rebecca Kong: We would see that, likely, not so much as a survey type of exercise but more as a research type of exercise for which there would be a specific research project design such that those who would have access to offenders could do interviews and collect that type of information. It doesn't seem like the type of information that's conducive to a survey.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay, that's excellent.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Arif Virani: Ms. Fry, can I just ask them for a clarification in terms of one thing they're going to supply—in 10 seconds?

The Chair: It would really have to be 10 seconds, Mr. Virani.

Mr. Arif Virani: You said you track the characteristics of the accused, the time it took to process in court, and the end result of the court proceeding. Was that something you were going to provide to the committee, and if it wasn't, could you please provide it?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Thank you for the clarification, because I didn't interpret that as an ask. We could look at whether there is a sufficient number of offences being tried for those four offences of the Criminal Code that pertain to hate crimes specifically. For all the other types of offences—which are, for example, mischief, uttering threats, or anything that was motivated by hate—we cannot track them down into the court system.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clermont.

Would you give that information to the clerk, please, so it can be passed on to all the committee members?

Mr. Yvan Clermont: Yes.

The Chair: I want to thank you for coming. It was very informative. I wish we had two hours with you, but thank you for coming.

I would like to go in camera now, so I'd like to clear the room of anyone who is not one member of an MP's staff or an MP. We're going to have a bell at 25 minutes after, and it's a 15-minute bell.

We have suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]