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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): Welcome, everybody, to meeting number 43 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I call the meeting to order. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Today we are beginning our study on eliminating hate crimes and violence against women and marginalized groups.

Witnesses, when you're ready to speak, you can click on your microphone icon to activate your mike, and address your comments through the chair. If you want to change your interpretation, if you look at the bottom of your screen, you will see that you can choose English, French or floor. When you're speaking, please speak slowly and clearly for our interpreters. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I want to welcome all of our witnesses.

We have with us today Amira Elghawaby, human rights advocate. From Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada, we have Saadi Mahdi, regional vice-president, Asif Khan, national director, public relations; and Safwan Choudhry, director, media relations. From the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, we have Nuzhat Jafri, executive director.

Each of our witnesses will have five minutes to make their remarks, which will be followed by a round of questions.

We're going to begin with Amira for five minutes.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby (Human Rights Advocate, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, for convening today's meeting.

Good morning, respected parliamentarians and staff. Thank you so much for inviting me to present today at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I am here in my personal capacity as a human rights advocate who “wears many hijabs”, as I like to say. I'm a founding board member of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, an organization that monitors hate in Canada, as well as a board member with the Silk Road Institute, an organization that fosters cross-cultural and interfaith understanding.

I'm also part of Canada's labour movement, specifically the Canadian Labour Congress, where we actually released a groundbreaking report in 2019 titled “Islamophobia at Work”. It's actually

there that I will begin my remarks, by discussing the ways in which Muslim women and girls are especially vulnerable to hate crimes by virtue of their status as Muslim women.

It is the combination and interaction of gender, racialization and religion that make Muslim women vulnerable to bias-motivated violence and intimidation. Many Muslim women in Canada and around the world choose to wear head coverings like what I'm wearing today, my hijab, or the niqab or burka, for various reasons. We know that over the years the hijab and niqab have been, and sadly, continue to be at times, vigorously debated and reported on by Canadian media. They are frequently politicized quite negatively. In fact, currently, Bill 21 in Quebec prevents women from wearing a hijab if they choose to work in various professions, including teaching, the law and policing.

As noted in the CLC's report on Islamophobia, the interaction of gender, religion, race and culture is especially acute for Muslim women who cover. Their visibility puts them at higher risk and makes them much more vulnerable to gender-based Islamophobia. They are immediately identified as targets for perpetrators motivated by hatred of Muslims and gender-based violence.

Of course, we don't know the exact reason or the evidence found by police in the most recent horrific attack in London against the Afzaal family, but we do know it was motivated by hate toward Muslims, and it is highly likely that their religious clothing was the reason they were most tragically targeted. Our thoughts and hearts are with those families and those they have left behind, including little Fayez.

A 2018 qualitative study by University of Toronto researcher Sidrah Ahmad, titled “Invisible Violence Against Hypervisible Women”, shows a very high rate of unreported gender-based violence against Muslim women in the GTA. That qualitative report documents the everyday Islamophobic experiences and impacts on Muslim women. The Muslim women in the study reported being spat at, yelled at, sworn at and experiencing physical as well as sexual assaults. Of the 40 Islamophobic incidents documented in the study, only three were reported to the police.

At this point, if I may, I will actually share my own personal experiences with the committee. Several incidents throughout my lifetime of wearing the hijab in Canada have really brought home to me how fraught it can sometimes be to wear visible Muslim clothing. In my own neighbourhood here in Ottawa, in Orleans, I too was almost hit by a truck that was deliberately and very dangerously swerving toward me while the driver was yelling obscenities at me. I have repeatedly been harassed and yelled at. While I maintain that the vast majority of Canadians are loving people who really promote dignity for all, these currents of hatred unfortunately do run through our society. These currents are, of course, the focus of my speech today, and I hope, some of the remedies you'll be looking at.

As Statistics Canada noted in its 2018 release on police-reported hate crime, for all types of hate crimes, nearly a third, 32%, of victims reported to police between 2010 and 2018 were female. Violent incidents targeting Muslim and indigenous populations were more likely than other types of hate crimes to involve female victims. Of all victims of violent crimes targeting the Muslim population that were reported to police, 45% were women or girls, as was the case for 45% of victims of hate crimes against indigenous populations.

Statistics Canada noted that the relatively high proportion of female victims of hate crimes targeting Muslim and indigenous populations could be related to specific factors, meaning the practice of wearing head coverings makes religious identity more visible for Muslim women than for Muslim men.

• (1105)

What we've also seen, unfortunately, is visibly Muslim politicians, athletes and celebrities who have been targets of intense hate and vitriol, being threatened daily with violence, rape or murder. Many of them are forced to leave their careers for their safety. We have, sadly, many examples in the current Parliament. As many may know, MP Iqra Khalid received horrific threats when she tabled M-103 and we know that MP Salma Zahid, who wears the head scarf, has also faced some harassment as well. Of course, I can't speak to what she's gone through but I know that it is not easy to represent constituents while also wearing religious clothing.

Hate crime statistics are hugely unreported, especially in the Muslim community as there is a lot of fear of being blamed and shamed. Of course, there is distrust of law enforcement or the feeling that there's unfair over-surveillance and detention anyhow within our Muslim communities. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, two-thirds of hate crimes are unreported.

Furthermore, we also realize that there are serious problems with prosecuting hate crimes. This is according to the fact that police solved just 28% of hate crime incidents in 2017, as shown by a Stats Canada analysis. By comparison, among all Criminal Code violations, excluding traffic violations, 40% were solved by police in that same year. Even when the hurdle of reporting to police is cleared by victims of hate crimes, the chances of success are 12% lower than with other types of offences.

Online hate is another area in which we know there is spillover into real life. Online hate does disproportionately impact racialized people, including women and visibly Muslim women, where the

agenda of online trolls and haters is to silence or harm women and to control who has a voice. This is an important point to note, especially for those who argue that limiting online content is a freedom of expression. There are limits to free expression, including hate speech, especially when violence and hate is planned or incited.

Many committee members today may be surprised to learn that a report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue in the U.K. identified more than 6,600 online pages, accounts or groups in Canada that were spreading white supremacist or misogynistic views. On a per capita basis, Canada was shown to be one of the most active countries in the world when it comes to spreading toxic views.

With the work at the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, we have advanced recommendations to government on how best to address online hate, which does remain a very serious problem. We know, for instance, that deplatforming works—

• (1110)

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's the end of your time.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: Okay.

The Chair: We'll get the rest of it on the questions.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: Sure. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we have Safwan here so we'll do a sound check with him and then we'll go to the next organization.

The next organization is Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada.

There are three of you. I'm not sure which one will start, but maybe, Ms. Mahdi, we'll start with you.

Mr. Asif Khan (National Director, Public Relations, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada): If it's okay, I'll go first and then we'll end with Saadia if that's all right.

The Chair: Very good. Please go ahead, Mr. Khan.

Mr. Asif Khan: Hello and *assalam alaikum* to my fellow Muslim friends here.

My name is Asif Khan. I'm the national public relations director of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada. We are a revivalist movement within Islam. We are also a persecuted community in many Muslim countries.

I'd like to thank the panel for inviting me to speak today; however, I will be brief and I'll extend some of my time to Saadia. I hope that will be okay. My colleague, Safwan, will also be brief as well. I'm sure Saadia's perspective will be much more valuable to the panel than hearing from us.

Before I do pass it off to Safwan, I would like to say that Islam's core objectives are twofold. The first is that everyone should attain to have a relationship with God and they should do so in their own way. The second objective is that everyone should serve humanity; that is, be kind to your neighbours, be kind to your countrymen and look after one another. The government is not in a place to promote the first objective, but the government can promote humanity as being core to the fabric of being Canadian.

Our community's motto is "Love for all and hatred for none". If each person took this to heart and strived to be of service to others, there could be no hate: no hate towards people of different religions, ethnicities, race and especially gender.

I thank you for your time. Godspeed.

Safwan.

Mr. Safwan Choudhry (Director, Media Relations, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada): Thank you, Asif. Most importantly, thank you for organizing this wonderful panel and giving us this opportunity.

Just like Asif, I don't plan to take more than a few seconds so I will be brief and then Saadia will cover the majority of our points of view.

The only thing I wish to add here is that words matter and leadership has never been more important. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson infamously described Muslim women in a burka as "letter boxes" and "bank robbers". The following week there was an increased record of 375% in anti-Muslim incidents. More than half of such incidents in the following three weeks were directed towards Muslim women and 42% of street-based incidents directly referenced Prime Minister Johnson and the language that he used.

Former president Nicolas Sarkozy of France stated that the problem of Muslim women's outfits is not a religious problem, that it is an issue of the freedom and dignity of women. This is a quote that I'm taking from the former president.

• (1115)

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I think there is an issue with the interpretation because I'm on the English channel and I'm hearing French.

The Chair: Yes, I don't hear that on the floor, but let's suspend and we'll come back to you in just a second.

Mr. Safwan Choudhry: For the benefit of our member of Parliament, I'll just repeat the last couple of sentences.

The point I was making is that words matter. Right now, leadership has never been more critical. In the U.K., Prime Minister Boris Johnson made comments describing Muslim women's head covering and burka as "letter boxes" and "bank robbers" and there was a 375% increase in anti-Muslim hate in the following two weeks. Forty-two per cent of the incidents were street incidents directed towards women. The perpetrators referenced Prime Minister Johnson's words. I also referenced the former president of France, Nico-

las Sarkozy, who said that a Muslim woman's outfit is not a religious problem, but an issue of the freedom and dignity of women.

We find it really interesting that right now, in a time where every country, city and state has decided to make the face mask compulsory in order to combat the coronavirus, this very statement about this being a matter of dignity of women is in direct conflict with that.

We look to our leaders and their choice of words. We're obviously grateful for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who as early as today issued an important statement about an incident that took place at the mosque in Edmonton. We urge all of our leaders to also question other world leaders and the statements they are making.

Thank you. I yield the floor to Saadia.

The Chair: Ms. Mahdi.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi (Regional Vice-President, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada): Thank you, Safwan and Asif.

Assalam alaikum. Peace be upon you all.

I'm very thankful and honoured to have this opportunity to speak to you today about my experience of living in Canada as a Muslim woman.

Canada has always been a beacon of peace and respect in the world and celebrates multiculturalism as a strength. Today, this image is being attacked, and all Canadians must work hard to ensure that it is upheld.

In 1985, when I moved to Canada, I was not truly aware of the significance of our move. As Ahmadi Muslims, my family fled persecution in Pakistan. Many families also made this journey to Canada, which serves as a safe haven from religious persecution. I came with my father, Naseem Mahdi, who was sent here as an imam, a religious missionary, who would serve the community for the next 25 years.

Going to school was a very pleasant experience for me. Throughout my elementary and high school period, there were only a handful of Muslims in our school. I have very fond memories of my school days. My childhood in Maple, Ontario, was very pleasant, and I never experienced any Islamophobic or racist remarks, even though we were definitely a visible minority. Now I'm surprised and saddened that the atmosphere is changing from the wonderful experiences of my childhood to the current atmosphere, where hate-motivated attacks are on the rise. Hate crimes have exponentially increased, and Muslims are targets. Decades later, my own daughters have been called terrorists and other racial slurs at school.

The recent tragedy that occurred in London, Ontario, has shaken the Canadian Muslim family to our core. The horrifying fact that this innocent family was murdered while taking an evening walk just because they were Muslims was a sickening wake-up call to all of us that much work needs to be done to educate our fellow Canadians, to remind them of their true values and to remove myths and misconceptions that lead to the hatred of Muslims.

Recently we have seen it become more common for people to proudly share racist and hateful opinions online in social media and in person. Many Muslim women have reported being bullied and attacked for the way they dress because our hijab makes us a visible minority. Our scripture tells us to wear the hijab as a symbol of our modesty. It is meant to show that we are different and that our faith is an important facet of our identity.

Bill C-21 in Quebec is a painful example of how dangerous it is for people in power to be misinformed. Banning people from wearing their religious clothing or symbols is not a reflection of a secular state, rather of an oppressive one. Freedom of religion and expression are guaranteed to us by the charter and, by passing this law, Quebec has unfortunately promoted the ideology that, if someone dresses differently, they are different. These misconceptions should be addressed, not validated by making such discriminatory laws.

I am a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, and our community has been working hard for many years to promote our motto, "love for all, hatred for none", and work for and with Canadian society for the betterment of all. We hold regular events to promote peace and celebrate diversity. We have blood drives, donation campaigns and food drives, all in an effort to work cohesively with the greater community and to highlight that it is our faith that makes us better Canadian citizens rather than hinders us, which is the perception.

Although a lot of work is being done by many communities and politicians across Canada, like the introduction of motion 103 by MP Iqra Khalid condemning Islamophobia, there is still a long road ahead.

Moreover, acts that are driven by hate due to race, religion or ethnicity should be punished to the full extent of the law. The fact that the London, Ontario, attacker has been charged with terrorism is a step in the right direction in order to deter others from carrying out such horrific acts.

• (1120)

Canada has become the epitome of what tolerance and justice looks like and shines as an example for the rest of the world. In order for this reputation to be upheld, education is the most important step that we as a nation can take. Learning about Islamic values is the first step towards respect and friendship among Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will go to our final witness, Ms. Jafri, for five minutes.

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri (Executive Director, Canadian Council of Muslim Women): First of all, thank you so very much for inviting the Canadian Council of Muslim Women this morning, Madam Chair, parliamentarians, Madam Clerk and staff.

My name is Nuzhat Jafri, and I am the executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, CCMW.

I'm speaking to you from the traditional territory of the Anishinabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. It is also the land of the Petun and Huron-Wendat peoples, and it's recognized officially as the land of

the Mississaugas of the Credit River, as they were here at the point of contact. This land is now home to many diverse first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

The CCMW is an organization dedicated to the equality, equity and empowerment of Canadian Muslim women and girls. It was founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1982 by the late Dr. Lila Fahlman and a group of determined Muslim women who sought to channel their passion for faith-centred social justice work to create a more inclusive Canada for all. We have 17 chapters across Canada. Our mission is to affirm the identities of Canadian Muslim women and promote our lived experiences through community engagement, public policy, stakeholder engagement and amplified awareness of the social injustices that Muslim women and girls endure in Canada, while advocating for their diverse needs and equipping local CCMW chapters with the necessary resources to maximize national efforts and mobilize local communities to join the movement. We approach our work through an intersectional lens and recognize our diverse identities and expressions. We are but one voice among many.

On the evening of June 6, 2021, Talat Afzaal, her son Salman, her daughter-in-law Madiha, her granddaughter Yumna, and her grandson Fayeze were out for a late spring walk in their London, Ontario, neighbourhood when the lives of four members of that beautiful family came to a crashing halt. Nine-year-old Fayeze survived, but he remains in hospital after sustaining serious injuries. This mass murder and heinous attack was the work of a white supremacist who was filled with hate against Muslims.

Three of the four individuals who were murdered were women. In light of this tragedy and increasing Islamophobic attacks on Muslim women, it is appropriate that the committee undertake a study on violence against Muslim women and other targeted women, including examining online hate and cyber-bullying from an intersectional perspective.

With a spate of hate-motivated attacks on Black Muslim women in hijab in Calgary and Edmonton, and ongoing harassment and abuse of visible Muslim women, murder as the ultimate result of this hatred and violence is not a surprise.

While we don't know what Talat, Madiha and Yumna were wearing, they were definitely in the perpetrator's sight. I know of a family that lives steps from where this attack occurred. Women who wear head scarves in that family are afraid of leaving their home. That fear is palpable among Canadian Muslims, particularly Muslim women and girls who can be identified easily by their clothing.

Gendered Islamophobia is real. As part of our digital anti-racism education—or DARE—project, we recently invited Canadian Muslim women, girls, trans individuals and non-binary individuals to share their experiences of Islamophobia with us. I have a number of examples here, but I'm going to cite just a few because they've already been shared by my other sisters. Here's what they've said:

"I was sexually, physically and verbally assaulted on the Sky-Train for wearing the hijab."

In high school, two hijab-wearing Muslim girls found their shared locker broken into. Upon attempting to open the lock with their key, it got stuck as gum was stuffed inside. While the girls struggled to open the lock, a group of other high school kids were watching and laughing at them.

"While working at a comic book store, I experienced verbal harassment by customers calling me a 'towel head' and a 'terrorist'."

"I was verbally abused repeatedly and was spat on."

"In elementary school, while in kindergarten, I was asked by another student if my parents were suicide bombers."

These experiences are commonplace for many Muslim women and girls, and they are exacerbated for Muslim women with disabilities, trans persons, non-binary persons, and Black or indigenous Muslim women and girls because of the multiple and intersecting disadvantages they experience in Canadian society.

● (1125)

It is also important to recognize that 87% of Muslims are racialized and racism is very much part of their Canadian experience.

In Quebec, the situation is even worse because of an unjust law where systemic Islamophobia is practised in plain sight and Québécois Muslim women are denied employment in the public sector because they wear a head scarf. That law gives permission to discriminate against Muslim women in the province, with little chance of recourse.

In addition to overt Islamophobia, at the core of this abuse and violence are sexism and misogyny. We need to understand sexism as a form of social oppression that interconnects with race, religion, class and other systems of marginalization. Gender-based violence cannot be properly understood without addressing inequality based on race, religion, class, ability, and so on.

Marginalized women experience more sexism compared to other women. For example, Black Muslim women experience almost six times as much sex-based discrimination compared to non-Black Muslim women. One in three Black Muslim women experiences sex-based discrimination, while less than one in 10 non-Black Muslim women does. It is important to highlight the specific disadvantages experienced by Canadian Black Muslim women because racism, sexism and Islamophobia manifest themselves in ways that are distinct from other Canadian Muslim women.

Marginalized women experience more sexism in many places compared to other women. For example, compared to others, proportionately more Black Muslim women report experiencing discrimination in banks, stores and restaurants, when dealing with the police and when crossing the Canadian border.

While Islamophobic attacks have become a daily occurrence in Canada, gendered Islamophobia needs to be addressed distinctly because of its intersectional nature. Policy and legislative responses must take into consideration the specific circumstances of Canadian women and the effects of gendered Islamophobia on their daily lives, their performance in school, their success in the labour mar-

ket, their experience of social integration and in all sectors of Canadian society.

It is not okay for a Muslim girl to have her hijab ripped off in her school. It is not okay for a Muslim woman to be assaulted on the subway. It is not okay for a Muslim woman to be denied employment because she wears a head scarf. It is not okay for a Muslim woman to be murdered because of her faith.

Canada needs to pass meaningful legislation to address online hate. Better reporting of hate crimes, including data collection that considers the intersectionality of Canadian Muslim women, girls, trans and non-binary persons.

White supremacist terrorists must be stopped in their tracks. Their groups must be disbanded and rendered illegal, and an active program of de-radicalization of their members must be a priority for the Canadian government.

The objective of terrorists is to terrorize and frighten their targets and disempower and debilitate them. We at the Canadian Council of Muslim Women will not let the terrorists achieve their objectives. Our commitment to equality, equity and empowerment of Canadian Muslim women and girls is stronger than ever and we will continue to do whatever we can to ensure that our resolve is unshaken.

We encourage members of this committee to follow our digital anti-racism education, or DARE, project and participate in our anti-Islamophobia and countering cyber-hate workshops. You can learn more about the project and register for the workshops at our dareto-beaware.ca website. We are grateful to the Department of Canadian Heritage for its financial support of this project. Incidentally, Amira Elghawaby is actually the facilitator for our anti-Islamophobia workshop.

Thank you for your time.

● (1130)

The Chair: Now we'll go into our first round of questions, with Ms. Wong for six minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to speak on this very important issue. Through you, I thank all the witnesses.

While we all understand the importance of discussing this issue in our committee, I would be remiss if I did not recognize that this study was, unfortunately, forced by the recent attack against a Muslim family in London, Ontario. Hate is hate.

In the riding of Richmond Centre, we have been dealing with a rise in anti-Asian racism that has run amok even across the nation. What my community has had to endure is beyond words.

Given that knowledge, I truly understand the pain and suffering that the Muslim community in Canada is experiencing and the pain that our colleague from London—Fanshawe must be experiencing. It is for these reasons that I would humbly request that I cede my time to Ms. Lindsay Mathysen.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Very good. We'll go to Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to my colleague Madam Wong. It's very kind.

Yes, my community, my hometown of London, has seen such incredible violence and incredible hurt and pain in the last few weeks, but I know that's been shared by every other community across Canada. I've heard from so many of my colleagues who said, "I went to a march. I went to a vigil." People are reaching out to me, and I've heard from people across this country as well, women who are scared to cross the street. It's truly our responsibility now to try to find ways to address this adequately and quickly.

I put forward a motion last week in the House of Commons which was adopted unanimously. It calls for a national action summit on Islamophobia to be held this summer. I would like to hear from all of the witnesses, if I may, on some of the measures, some of the actual actions, they want to see from this summit, and give us recommendations on how to move forward with that.

• (1135)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Elghawaby.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: Thank you so much, MP Mathysen, for supporting that motion for a summit on Islamophobia. It is certainly welcome. As MP Wong mentioned, hate cuts across many communities, and we also stand in solidarity with our Asian Canadians, Black Canadians, indigenous Canadians and Jewish Canadians. Sadly, the gamut runs long, and we know that many communities are targeted.

In terms of the summit on Islamophobia, I would like to say that solutions that I would put forward would help address hate across communities, so to essentially address the poison that is impacting on many communities. To begin with, there are a few things.

The number one thing that I'd start with is that in order to fully address a problem, we need to know the full scope of it. At the moment, as mentioned in my intervention, we actually don't know the full scope of hate crimes and hate incidents in Canada. As I mentioned, two-thirds are not reported.

Every five years Statistics Canada releases what's called a victimization portion of their general social survey. In fact, the most recent one for 2021 came out in May, and we still don't have the numbers. In that victimization survey, Canadians who have experienced any type of crime self-report, and for 2014, we actually saw that 5% of all crimes people reported were hate crimes. That basically translates to 300,000 people in Canada who said they were a

victim of a hate crime. One solution to help us really grapple with this issue is to have that victimization survey released annually to help us have a better understanding.

Next, what I would say is, again, along with that idea of reporting, we need to remove barriers to reporting. I talked a little bit about that. That includes, for instance, allowing for online reporting, being able to report hate online. We've seen that here in Ottawa. The Ottawa Police Service has allowed for an online portal, and we could look for other ways, or at third party reporting. We could be bolstering community organizations, providing them the support to take reports of hate crimes and hate incidents and funnel that information back to law enforcement locally, and also to our national law enforcement agencies in order to track white supremacist groups and hate groups in this country and their activities.

There are many things, but I would say one thing is really to bolster our anti-racism directorates. There's a federal anti-racism directorate. It needs to be bolstered in order to not only review barriers and discrimination internally within and across government departments, but also to be front-facing, public-facing, and promoting national campaigns against hate. As well, we need to convene summits that look more broadly at the issue of hate, so that we can bring communities together and examine the different ways that people are impacted.

Finally, I have one more point. I am a board member of the Silk Road Institute, and one of the things that we do is hold cultural arts programming. We are the only Muslim theatre company in North America. With supports from government we're able to showcase cultural arts to help win hearts and minds. There's a lot of misrepresentation of Muslim communities, just like there is of Asians and other minority communities. Their representation is often very negative, which helps to feed that "authorisation" and dehumanization of various minority communities. Bolstering the funding for cultural arts and the ability to reach across communities would be also very helpful.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Khan.

• (1140)

Mr. Asif Khan: On what our sister just explained, I'd like to reiterate those points. She spoke eloquently and much to the topic.

With regard to the national summit on Islamophobia, first, we would be advocates of having whatever solutions are provided not just being applicable to the Muslim community but to all communities that are victims of hate. Any expression of hate has to be suppressed.

One thing I would like to mention is that the term “Islamophobia” actually doesn’t really help or aid the topic. I know it’s not a term that anyone here has created, and it’s something that has been accepted by pretty well everybody, but the term “phobia” means to be afraid of something, and then it’s to be afraid of Islam and to be afraid of Muslims. That is, in essence, a bit of the problem. Nonetheless, I know it’s a topic for another time.

That’s all I would say right now. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. That’s the end of your time, Ms. Mathysen.

Now we will go to Ms. Zahid for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses, my good friends, people I have worked with for the last many years to build a more inclusive Canada.

Thank you, Madam Elghawaby, for all the work you have done to combat racism.

Thank you, Mr. Khan, for building bridges. I have been to your organization many times where you have made efforts to bring the communities together to break these walls of hatred. I really appreciate all your work.

Thank you, Ms. Jafri. We were together recently to launch the Scarborough chapter of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. Thank you for all the work you are doing to make sure that no one in Canada feels scared or fearful.

Hate crimes have been on the rise in Canada, and the last few weeks have been very difficult for all Canadians, but particularly for the Muslim community. We saw the loss of four innocent lives to an act of terrorism motivated by hate: Islamophobia. It was very difficult to sit there and see those four coffins wrapped in the Canadian flag. In the days that followed, we saw a Somali woman wearing a hijab attacked, the Edmonton mosque vandalized with swastikas and two people arrested following an attempted break-in at the Islamic Institute of Toronto.

For all of us, it has not been easy.

Clearly, these incidents show that Islamophobia exists here in Canada. Acts of hate exist. What can the federal government do to better support Muslim communities and the communities that have been targeted by these acts of hate?

Maybe I can start with—

The Chair: Can we start with Mr. Choudhry? He has his hand up, I think.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes, we can start with Mr. Choudhry. Anyone can start.

Please go ahead.

The Chair: Mr. Choudhry, go ahead.

Mr. Safwan Choudhry: Thank you so much, and thank you for your kind words.

Whenever we think about solutions and we’re thinking through policy, it also helps to see examples from other nations and coun-

tries that have had similar situations and how they handled them and what are the results.

As Canada and our government will be thinking through this in the coming days and weeks, I would like to share the example of New Zealand, where in 2019 the world head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, praised the response of New Zealand’s prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, and the New Zealand government and public to the terrorist attack that targeted the mosque in Christchurch.

While we all know what took place, I think what’s more important is the excellent and model way that the New Zealand government, and particularly the prime minister, responded to the attack. The example she set, starting with herself, is truly praiseworthy. It has been a reaction of the highest order. We actually think that many countries, including Canada, can learn from that.

The public in New Zealand also offered its full support. The radio stations and the television stations announced that they would play the Muslim call to prayer, the adhan, at the time of the Friday prayer to show their solidarity with Muslims. Further to that, non-Muslim women, including Christians, Jews and women of no faith, decided that they would wear the head scarf as a gesture of support and empathy, starting with the prime minister.

These types of actions led by the policy-makers in New Zealand started at the top and transcended all the way down in society, in partnership and collaboration with news media outlets. It has given that country an opportunity to be more united than ever before. I think it’s an example that Canada can certainly take some pointers from.

• (1145)

The Chair: Ms. Elghawaby.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: I’ll let Ms. Nuzhat go before me because she didn’t have a chance last time.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri: Thank you, MP Zahid, for that question about what the Canadian government can do.

As I mentioned in my remarks, I think it is really important to pass meaningful legislation to deal with online hate, and enact better laws to look at hate crimes in a way that is not currently available to those making complaints, as well as the way the hate crime data are captured by different police services—well, in fact, all police services.

Different jurisdictions have responsibility for this, but the government can lead and mandate that the data be captured in a way that takes into account the intersectionality of Canadian Muslim women and Muslims in general. There is a lot more to say about this, and I don’t want to take up everyone else’s space, but I really like the example of the Government of New Zealand.

Platitudes are great. Shows of support are great. We saw many of the politicians come forward and demonstrate that, and we're grateful for their words of comfort and commitment to act on this, but please act. Pass the necessary legislation. Disband those hate groups. You can do that. You have the capacity to do that. These groups exist. They are easy to identify. Sometimes, yes, they hide in the dark corners of the net, but so many of them are visible and vocal, so please do find them.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses for their testimony and for their very personal accounts they gave.

I'm going to ask a general question and I'd like everyone to answer it, if possible.

Mr. Choudhry mentioned the example of France and the United Kingdom, as well as the comments of Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Johnson. We don't need to look very far. Very recently, we saw a U.S. president to the south fanning the flames of intolerance and we witnessed the consequences. I understand that's one thing people need to work on.

I'd like to hear from you on the smaller-scale situation. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems a different number of hate crimes occur in larger cities than in smaller municipalities. I'm thinking about what Ms. Mahdi said earlier. When she was a little girl, she lived in Maple and she didn't experience any incidents. Maple is not a large community. It seems that the threshold of tolerance was much higher in this small community. I'd like to hear from witnesses about the difference between the two communities. Is there more contact when children go to school with people from the communities? After one or two generations, does the situation improve?

I'd like you to talk about this in general, please.

[English]

The Chair: Let's start with Amira.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: Thank you very much, MP Normandin, for your excellent question.

It bears more study to look at how different communities are dealing with hate. The problem, again, goes back to that reporting.

While we can share anecdotally some of the experiences we've had, the problem is in capturing that data. Because we don't have third party reporting, we are not getting reports, for instance, from community organizations or national advocacy organizations that are taking reports of hate, so it's really hard for us to be able to diagnose the problem. How we can get better data is something for this committee to think about and for the summit, eventually. That's always going to help us to understand the full extent of the problem and address the solution.

In terms of the education, I know that, for instance, every year the federal government will send out amazing resources on Remembrance Day for teachers right across the country. These resources are posters and curricula and they're wonderful ways in which teachers can talk about Remembrance Day. Similarly, it would be wonderful to see the federal government champion similar types of educational resources and supports for a national curricula around anti-racism and anti-hate, right throughout elementary and secondary schools and provide resources for teachers.

I, myself, have done hundreds of workshops in schools. One of the things that always strikes me is the lack of information round the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for instance. It would be very useful and helpful for the Canadian government to ensure that our young people have full information on it.

The sad thing we know is that we do see hate crimes committed by young people. The accused in London is only 20 years old. From some of the statistics over the years on hate crimes, we've actually seen that in certain years hate crimes were committed and perpetrated against religious communities often by people who are under the age of 18. There is something going on with young people, with the radicalization that's happening and the hate they are feeling towards religious minority communities.

We definitely need to think about that educational piece. A national way of spreading the awareness would be a very powerful tool, I believe.

• (1150)

The Chair: Ms. Mahdi.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: I agree with what Ms. Elghawaby just said. A lot of times the onus falls on other Muslim teachers or students to educate their classes or schools. We do have Islamic Heritage Month. Through school council, I have put up posters and made presentations for our schools and helped to spread information, but it shouldn't be only when there is a Muslim volunteer available. It should be done through the education system.

It is true that this is starting at a very young age. Because social media is so unmonitored, these young children are reading these hateful things and they are the ones.... Like I mentioned, my daughters in elementary school were called those racist remarks and were referred to as terrorists.

I think that prior to 9/11, which was my experience growing up in Canada, there wasn't that much hate in Canada that was outwardly expressed towards Muslims. That's my experience. After that, the media played a big role in promoting that false narrative of Muslims being terrorists. That's when the name-calling started. That's when people began to feel that it was okay to mimic what they heard in the media.

When I see politicians and people who are in leadership positions wearing the head scarf, it is inspiring for us. Our daughters then say that they also want to go into those leadership positions, but if they are not being protected, it is very disheartening.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

We'll go now to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Many of the witnesses have talked about meaningful legislation. In Canada right now, the government has set up the anti-racism strategy, but many national organizations have actually called for meaningful legislation to follow it. Of course, the two pieces we hear most of are a national anti-racism act and an online hate act.

Maybe the witnesses could talk about that specifically, including the timelines on that, what they'd like to see from that, and how important that is.

The Chair: We will start with Ms. Jafri.

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri: Thank you so much for those questions.

Perhaps I could go back to the education we were talking about before. It's really important for all of this education to begin very early.

I want to give you an example of how change can happen. I have two grandchildren who are doing online learning right now. In their classroom, they do a land acknowledgement. It's part of their routine and their opening exercises, along with things like celebrating other faiths' festivals or religious occasions and learning about them. There are many ways of doing this.

There is one other thing about where the interaction occurs. Depending on where you are, unfortunately the proximity to people of different faiths is not enough, because we have communities in which we have very large populations of Muslims and there the experiences can be as unpleasant and unwelcome as in rural communities. At every level leaders in the community have to act in a way that promotes inclusion of all communities.

On the idea of an anti-racism act or other legislation, I'm going to go back to what I was talking about. We need legislation that is perhaps very specific to gender-based violence, that incorporates the experiences of diverse Muslim communities or Muslim women in it and in any policy work that is done. Besides the racism aspect, the intersectional aspects of gender and other identities have to be incorporated into any legislation or policy that the government undertakes.

● (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Khan.

Mr. Asif Khan: As mentioned by my colleague earlier, words really do matter. Hate was allowed to rise to the surface because of certain political figures, especially to the south of us and overseas, as mentioned. Prior to that, suppressing hate existed all over, especially in western countries, and it took decades for us to lower hate and try to eradicate it. It's now going to take many more years to suppress this hate that has been allowed to simmer back up.

This is where Canada's leaders calling out the world on all forms of injustice—not just hate but all forms of injustice—will help change hearts and minds. It has to happen all over the world. Our

leaders have to lead by example. They have to be the ones to change hearts globally. Canada's main export to the world should be our love for humanity and our call against injustices.

Our community, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, is going to be launching something called the “love for all” initiative. We'll share some of those ideas with you. It's not just about Islamophobia but about all expressions of hate and injustice that we're going to try to do our part to help quell.

Also, our own community is going to be having a conference to better provide suggestions for this national summit that's coming up, so we'll have some concrete suggestions to forward as well.

The Chair: Ms. Elghawaby.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: Thank you so much, MP Mathysen, for that question.

I do believe the anti-racism directorate should be entrenched in legislation. I think it's very important to, hopefully, maintain such a part of the government, to ensure that work continues regardless of who is holding power in our government, and to ensure that it is not politicized. I think one of the most difficult things our communities have faced in previous years is the politicization of even the word “Islamophobia”.

I would urge all committee members to think very much about how leaders do talk about our communities, as was mentioned earlier by the witness Mr. Khan. The way we are described in media and in political rhetoric does have a direct impact on our communities, and it is very important that our political leaders use inclusive language. I will tell you from first-hand experience that when we hear our political leaders use inclusive language, with respect for all people who live in Canada and their backgrounds, we really do feel a change in tenor.

On the flip side, when our communities are treated as being under suspicion.... There's a wonderful report by the RCMP called “Words Make Worlds” that talks about, for instance, the way that communities can be scapegoated. This really does have a direct impact not just on us as adults but especially on our children who are deeply impacted and hurt by the way our communities can sometimes be described. Legislation is going to be very important as is an anti-racism directorate, as well as of course the online piece that we have been waiting for.

● (1200)

The Chair: Excellent. Very well said.

I think we'll leave it there for this panel.

To all of the witnesses, thank you for what you've said. I also want to let you know, and the rest of the committee, that for the next panel, one of our witnesses is not able to show up. If you want to stay, then at the will of the committee, I would invite you to stay. We would perhaps have an opportunity to ask even more questions.

Yes, Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I just want to make a request of the witnesses. I think there was less time, and we had so many things we needed to discuss. If they have some recommendations or suggestions we should look into that they weren't able to discuss today, perhaps they could send us some written submissions so that we can take into consideration their recommendations as we go through this report.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I felt that there was less time today, and I had many questions that I wasn't able to ask. It would be good if they could send us some written submissions.

The Chair: Yes. I think that would be good. They can direct those to the clerk. I would add that we are also putting up on the web page a call for briefs or one-page summaries from many people across the country.

I will now welcome our new witness, who is Samya Hasan, executive director of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians.

Samya, we'll give you five minutes to make your opening remarks. Then we'll go into questions.

Ms. Samya Hasan (Executive Director, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians): Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of this panel today. I really appreciate the timing of this invitation.

As mentioned, my name is Samya Hasan, and I am the executive director of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. CASSA is a social justice umbrella agency supporting the well-being of South Asians in Canada.

I'd also like to acknowledge that I am joining you today from the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, which is covered by the Williams Treaties, and its colonial name is Durham region.

It's a difficult moment for me to speak today, as the entire Muslim community in Canada grieves the loss of the Afzaal family, as we witness the hate crimes against Black Muslim women in Alberta, as we see videos circulating on social media celebrating the London terrorist attack, and as we hear about the violent threats being made to a number of mosques in the GTA. However, I am here today to support our communities at this difficult time with hopes that the four Muslim Canadian lives lost will be far too many for our political leaders and that urgent action will be taken to reassure the Muslim community once again that we are safe in this country.

The disproportionate impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women has been widely documented in Europe, the United States and Canada. Clearly, Islamophobia is a gendered crisis; it operates according to gendered stereotypes of Muslim men as violent, terrorists and abusive, and of Muslim women as accomplices or op-

pressed. This is especially true for visibly Muslim women who choose to wear the niqab or the hijab, due to the preconceived notion that Muslim women have been forced to dress this way by patriarchal systems.

In fact, in a survey published by the Toronto Star in 2017, 56% of Canadians believed that Islam suppresses women. On the contrary, there is very little understanding or recognition of the worldwide movement of Muslim women to wear the hijab as a sign of empowerment. These stereotypes of Muslim women in policies, political rhetoric and the media lead to increased Islamophobic incidents against visibly Muslim women. One such policy was the now dismantled barbaric cultural practices act of 2015. Due to the limited time I have today, I'm not going to talk about the online hate component, as I know my colleagues have probably discussed it, and my sister, Amira Elghawaby, has talked about that at length.

For a long time, we shamed France for its anti-hijab and anti-niqab policies, yet we have a province in our own country that passed unconstitutional policies without any evidence of harm to society based on what Muslim women can or cannot wear. In these policies, we see the height of hypocrisy of modern, white feminism, which is led mainly by white women, to the exclusion and detriment of visibly Muslim women and other racialized women who feel empowered by their faith and choose to wear the hijab or the niqab.

On the other hand, widely believed stereotypes of Muslim women as being oppressed in their own communities do not do Muslim women any favours. In fact, it is the state that passed the Islamophobic policies and it is the state that is oppressing Muslim women by limiting their freedom to choose. It is the state that oppresses Muslim women by sitting idly while their human and constitutional rights are being abused and doors to opportunities in this country are closed for them, just because they choose to dress a certain way. This is systemic social and economic exclusion of visibly Muslim women, yet we are silent. Decades of being exposed and victimized by Islamophobia described in detail by my other colleagues today have led many Muslim women to feel unsafe, defensive, distrustful and afraid, afraid that anything that they do or say can be used against their communities by the media.

To address this crisis, I urge this government to work with Muslim women and Muslim-led community groups and organizations to combat Islamophobia with a focus on the gendered impact of this crisis. I urge this government to work with the provinces to mandate a community-informed education curriculum on Islamophobia, among other areas of anti-racism such as anti-Black racism and anti-indigenous racism, especially in public schools, so that our children grow up to respect people of all faiths, cultures and races.

Finally and most importantly, I urge this government to implement restrictions on online hate and legislate penalties now for social media platforms for not shutting down hate content.

I'm going to end with the brilliant words of Dr. Yaser Haddara from Hamilton from an article I read earlier this week:

Our leaders must take the needed hard look in the mirror. They must take responsibility for their own actions and those of their political parties and supporters. They must commit to do better and they absolutely must do better. Hate thrives in the dark. We fight it with transparency, accountability, and equality before the law. No more special laws,—

• (1205)

That's with reference to Bill 21:

—no more secret audits,—

That's with reference to the report from last week showing the CRA unfairly targeting Muslim charities over the last decade:

—no more double standards. Anything less, and I fear we'll soon stand again in yet another Canadian city to mourn more Canadians lost.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We're going to begin our rounds of questioning, and we'll start with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who appeared on the last panel and this panel as well. Thank you for being here. My heartfelt condolences to the Muslim community. I'm so sorry for what happened.

I come from a family where my mom wore a scarf, and my grandma, who is 87 years old, would not step out of the house, or even be inside the house, without her scarf. I remember my mom in the hospital. She passed away when we were fairly young. The scarf was so important to her. The doctors told us that she was unconscious, but she would grab her scarf and cover her head. I know the importance of it.

My grandpa wore a turban all his life. Dad wears a turban. My brother also wears a turban. As an older sister, I am still very protective towards my brother. He's much older now. He's a physician. I still feel the need to protect him, because the turban is visible.

I'm so sorry this is the Canada we live in right now. We need to change it, and I'm so thankful you guys are here giving your opinions and giving us recommendations, because that's how the change will begin.

I am in agreement that any change that has to happen has to start at a young age. I also believe that even when you talk about gender equality, we need to get younger kids involved in that. Just as they expect their rights to be respected, they need to do the same for others. This all needs to start at a young age.

I'm sorry that I'm getting emotional, but I'm really hurt by what I see. I've gone to the rallies that were held in response to what was happening to Asian Canadians here. I'm hurt that took place.

One of my favourite quotes is, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." I like to believe and live with that in mind.

The questions I'm going to ask have to do with how you feel.

As Muslim women being targeted, what are the effects of this hate crime on you? How do you feel when that happens? In order for us to make any kind of change, we need to first know what it feels like to have to go through that.

Some of us on this committee understand what you go through, but I'd like to hear it from you. What do women feel when they're targeted and the subject of a hate crime? Even when young kids wear a hijab and go to school and they're targeted, can you speak to that? I would appreciate that.

• (1210)

The Chair: We'll start with Ms. Hasan, and then we'll go over to Saadia.

Ms. Samya Hasan: Thank you so much for that question, MP Sahota.

It's very difficult to describe in words how a woman feels when she goes through that, but I can say the entire community is shaken to the core by what happened, and it's not easy at all. I have a seven-year-old daughter as well, and trying to understand how to explain to her that she's not safe is very difficult. People are feeling scared. I've talked to colleagues who are telling their family members not to go out for a walk. People are taking off their hijabs for fear of their safety.

It's not what we want for this country, and it's not why people immigrated to this country. We came here to feel safe, and right now the community does not feel safe.

The Chair: Ms. Mahdi.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: Yes, just as Ms. Hasan said, and as I mentioned, as Ahmadiyya Muslims, many of us escaped religious persecution in our homelands to come to Canada, to feel safe, and when these types of things happen, it really affects us deeply and personally.

Speaking in reference to children, my daughter was in grade six, and she had started wearing the hijab. On the first day, somebody said, "Oh, are you a terrorist now?" She was so upset because, as a young child, she didn't have that confidence yet. She didn't have that deep understanding, and it made her really upset. The next day, the same boy tried to yank it off of her head. It was handled very well. The principal handled it very well. I'm thankful for that, but the point is that when a child goes through something like this, it makes them question everything.

It doesn't just affect them that this was one person who did one thing, and he apologized and it's all good. It makes them question their identity, their religion, their everything. As they grow up, if they continue to see these things happen, they don't know what their identity is, and it becomes very difficult for them because now they will be in a conflict between what they feel they should be doing and what they feel will keep them safe. It's very important that the schools, the teachers, the educators make sure that those places are safe for our children.

The Chair: That's the time on that question.

We'll go next to Ms. Dhillon for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Our previous panel and this panel have very eloquently stated the harassment, the violence, the discrimination, the hatred they have all faced. It's very difficult for all of you to speak of this, and we are all cognizant of this in this committee. It's very troublesome. The things we hear about are very hurtful to people, visible minorities and those wearing religious symbols.

I'd like to start my questioning, and this may be for everybody, or we could start with Ms. Elghawaby.

Could you please talk to us about intersectionality, Black women who wear hijabs, the treatment, statistically, that was spoken of and what they are subjected to? Please, could you speak to us about the intersectionality of racism and religious discrimination?

• (1215)

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: I know that Nuzhat is still on the call as well, and the Canadian Council of Muslim Women has done a lot of work on that.

What I can certainly say—and MP Dhillon, thank you so much for the question—is that, absolutely, when we're talking about hate crimes specifically and hate that's targeting our communities, an issue that Nuzhat had raised, which I have seen first-hand in my work with police services, is that when someone reports a hate crime to police, basically police, if you can imagine, have boxes of identities that they have to check off.

For instance, if someone is both Asian and Muslim, and they report a hate incident or a hate crime to the police, the police can only choose one box. Right across the country, it's only one box. That means we are not capturing the intersectional nature of hate in our communities. That's just a very basic example.

As you know, people can be targeted for multiple identities. For instance, if a man with a turban is targeted because he was perceived as being a Muslim, which box will it be? That's the question. These are different things to think about and are examples of how our institutions are still catching up to understanding the intersecting identities that people hold.

Before I cede the rest of the time to Nuzhat to speak more to that, I would also just like to urge the committee—it's why I tried to stay around, and Samya has raised it as well very eloquently. It would be such a powerful statement from this committee for it to condemn Quebec's Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, which is essentially state-sanctioned discrimination against Muslim women, as well as other visible minority communities including Jewish Quebec communities, the Sikh community and anyone who wants to wear a religious piece of clothing and to continue to contribute, as any other Quebecer has the right to do.

When we're telling our children that they can grow up to be whoever they want to be, to participate however they want to, that is true for everyone in Canada, except if you are living in Quebec. It is definitely an erosion of the human rights and freedoms that we

all cherish, and it certainly has a disproportionate impact on Muslim women and girls. A statement from this committee would be very welcome.

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri: Madam Chair, may I address the question?

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri: MP Dhillon, thank you for that question.

As I mentioned, the intersectionality aspect is very important.

One thing you've probably seen during this panel and you've probably experienced it in your communities is that Muslims are not a monolith. They are extremely diverse, racially, economically, ethnically, and in how they dress. Sometimes you don't know the multiple identities of an individual. That's why this cannot be a straightforward strategy to end or deal with Islamophobia. It has to take into consideration the diversity of Muslims, and then within the diverse communities of Muslims, the specific intersectionalities of Muslim women. That could be anything. It could be whether they have a disability or it could be their race.

I mentioned the stats related to Black Muslim women. You've seen the stats. You've seen the incidents and media reports about the Black Muslim women who have been attacked in Alberta. That happens to those communities in Ontario as well. Therefore, it's not a surprise.

It's the intersection of race, gender and their visibility as Muslims, so Islamophobia is at play, but also the perception that people have about Muslim women as oppressed, weak and unable to take care of themselves and defend themselves. They're targeted because they're perceived to be weak, and nothing can be farther from the truth.

However, the purpose of the terrorist is to terrorize, to inculcate fear in those communities. Yes, you'll start fearing; you'll start being afraid to wear your religious symbol or your hijab on your head, because you can be attacked. That's what we need to fight. That's what we need to counter.

The Chair: Absolutely.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Amira Elghawaby: I have to go. I will take my leave.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much both of you.

It's wonderful to have you.

Ms. Nuzhat Jafri: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Normandin now has the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I'm back from the House.

The Chair: Oh, welcome, Ms. Larouche!

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Today, the Conservative Party brought forward a motion in the House that relates to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and that's why I wasn't here for the first hour of the meeting.

I want to begin by thanking the witnesses. We all agree that hate and Islamophobia have no place here today, in 2021.

I've already offered my condolences to my colleague the member for London-Fanshawe, who experienced these events in her community. We know that there was a solidarity movement surrounding all of this. I'd like to extend my condolences again to all of the victims, because this is the first time I've spoken as part of this study.

I'd also like to thank Ms. Normandin for filling in for me in the first hour.

Ms. Jafri, you talked about a very interesting factor, interspecific diversity among Muslim women. What recommendations could be made to ensure that this diversity of perspectives among Muslim women is better represented from the perspective of education, discussion and exchange with others? Could you talk more about this diversity?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Hasan.

Ms. Samya Hasan: I'll fill in for Nuzhat. I know she had to leave.

Thank you for your question. It's a very important question.

We've been talking about diversity within racialized communities. As an organization that serves South Asians, we know firsthand that South Asian communities often are mistaken as a monolith. We're not. There is so much diversity within our communities. The same goes for the Muslim community. There's even more diversity there in terms of the countries people come from, the colour of their skin, the culture they practise, the language they speak, their socio-economic status and their belief system within Islam. Islam is a spectrum of different beliefs. Everybody doesn't have the same belief. There are schools of thought within that belief system. It's extremely, extremely diverse.

I think the best way to go about creating policies, programs and curricula is to have it be community-led and to work with Muslim leaders and diverse Muslim organizations—we've had a diversity of Muslim organizations here on the panel—and see how they want those policies, programs and curricula to be created and developed. Just as it's so important for policies within indigenous communities to be indigenous-led, the same goes for the Muslim community for any policy or program that is created. As an outsider from the community, you're not going to be able to understand the diversity and all the different opinions. I'm a Muslim person and I don't even know all of the different opinions. I can't be a representative of all Muslims in Canada.

I think that is something that should be taken into account and policy-makers should be mindful of.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You're talking about the importance of considering the diverse perspectives that exist within different communities. Indeed, they're not monoliths. Different ways of thinking exist side by side in these communities. I understand that.

We are on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, but I also had to replace a colleague on the Standing Committee on Pub-

lic Safety and National Security. During the opening remarks, I heard that institutions like the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police need to do more to foster inclusion and diversity.

If these federal institutions were to recruit more people from diverse backgrounds and reach out for different faces, wouldn't that send a strong message?

It could send a message of education and, more importantly, openness.

• (1225)

[English]

Ms. Samya Hasan: In terms of institutions, we've had a really great relationship with the anti-racism secretariat at the federal level. One of the things we have been discussing with them is working with all departments across the federal government. If there are principles and policies that the anti-racism secretariat is setting up, for example, on the collection of race-based disaggregated data, it should be across all federal departments and institutions.

As Amira said this morning, we need to bolster the anti-racism secretariat and give them the resources they need to specialize in, unfortunately, the different forms of racism and hate that exist in this country. They really need to be well resourced to tackle this. I think they would be the body to handle that kind of work, to work across institutions and departments at the federal level on all forms of racism and hate.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In your opinion, could the federal government help prevent crime in any other ways? You mentioned an institution.

How can the government be more supportive of the various communities across the country so that they can take their place? Most importantly, how can it continue to address hate crimes, Islamophobic crimes, and crimes against Asian communities?

Besides the secretariat, do you see any other solutions that would involve the federal government?

[English]

The Chair: Please give a very brief answer.

Ms. Samya Hasan: Sure.

If I were to choose one thing, I would say it would be the online hate legislation. We know that a lot of the radicalization and anti-Muslim hate is spreading online. It's now or never. We really need that legislation, which we've been waiting for for a very long time, to mandate social media platforms to shut down hate. If they don't, penalties should be assigned to them.

Definitely, the online hate legislation is the biggest ask from me and I know from a lot of the panellists as well.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know, Ms. Hasan, that you were listening, but you weren't necessarily as active in the first hour when I asked all the witnesses to comment on that national action summit. I asked what recommendations, what actions, they wanted to see from that summit. I would like to ask you, understanding, of course, that it can be extremely complicated. You talked about the diversity within communities but that being community-led... If you could provide some other recommendations that you would like to see come out of that summit, I would appreciate that.

Ms. Samya Hasan: Sure.

I think, going back to some of the recommendations that we've made, we actually submitted a list of seven recommendations to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General back in 2020, and I believe we met as well, MP Mathysen, about those recommendations.

Again, first and foremost, the online hate legislation is paramount, and it's critical and urgent for that to be implemented. I know that Amira spoke a little bit about the victimization portion of the general social survey and having that implemented annually so that we can collect better data on what is going on around hate crimes, hate speech and hate incidents so that we can create better policies to combat them.

We had that discussion at length this morning around mandating curriculum in schools, working with the provinces—I know it is within the jurisdiction of the provinces—to ensure that we have anti-racism curricula. It's not just diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism, which are great—and it happens across the board in Canada where we celebrate different faiths and celebrate differences—but actual anti-racism, anti-oppressive approaches. Some of the witnesses this morning mentioned that it starts in the school system. I grew up in the public school system as well, and I can't count on my fingers the number of times that I had Islamophobic incidents and hate and physical violence against me as a visibly Muslim student.

Those are definitely things that we, as CASSA, have been asking for. We're also part of a larger group called the Anti-Hate Community Leaders' Group. It's a group of over 40 organizations and individuals across Canada that have been pushing for anti-hate legislation and anti-hate policies. We need to send a strong message through this summit—I know it was mentioned this morning as well—from all leaders in this country that Islamophobia will not be tolerated. We've seen on social media that there have been some individuals who have been celebrating the London terrorist attack. There needs to be strong condemnation of those individuals. We need to see that those individuals face consequences for spreading that hate, because that's where it starts. It starts online. It starts in schools.

• (1230)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Yes, unfortunately, and it was mentioned, as well, that when those leaders come out and are racist, it gives permission almost. I've certainly heard that. My office has heard that, unfortunately. We are trying to report that as much as possible. I think it was stated by my leader that hate is like a fire. If you don't extinguish it quickly, it does spread far too quickly.

I want to expand on some of those pieces of legislation that we were talking about before and that you just mentioned. One of the things that we often hear about, too, is the Employment Equity Act. We know that women are still paid a great deal less, but it's even more so when you are a racialized woman. Could you talk about the strengthening of the federal Employment Equity Act and attaching equity measures to all federal investments and recovery programs that we're seeing coming out of COVID to ensure that racialized groups and other under-represented groups have that equality and access to employment, as well as to those resources?

Ms. Samya Hasan: Thank you for that question, MP Mathysen.

That is very much connected to the anti-racism efforts that we really need to step up on. On employment equity, as you know, during the pandemic we've seen racialized communities being disproportionately impacted by COVID, partly as a result of their being overrepresented in front-line precarious labour. CASSA did a study over the last three years on South Asian immigrants in Toronto and their trying to secure decent employment. One thing we found was that despite having amazing credentials, having a great education either from here or from back home, they're still struggling to secure decent employment. I'm talking about even something that is above minimum wage, so it's very difficult.

You are right about the gendered aspect of employment equity. Women face even more barriers, especially women who have language barriers, women who are not as fluent in English or who are at home for a long time to take care of household responsibilities and then want to go back into the workforce. There are not a lot of training opportunities for women who have scheduling conflicts. There are a lot of barriers that racialized women face. I think that should be an important part of the employment equity legislation, and there's also working with the province on employment equity legislation.

We know that at the federal level it will only cover a certain portion of the Canadian public. It won't cover all of the population. Work with the provinces as well to push for employment equity legislation on that front.

The Chair: Now we're going to Ms. Wong for five minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to move on with something we have already touched on, and that is about cyber-violence and cyber-bullying. Because of COVID, a lot of us are online and doing Zoom, and also a lot of our children, young people and people of all ages spend a lot of time online. Definitely that is one consequence of COVID.

Does the persistence of cyber-violence and cyber-bullying contribute to other forms of violence or hate crimes in Canada? If you think so, how? That's for both our witnesses, please.

• (1235)

Ms. Samya Hasan: I know I've spoken a lot.

Do you want to go, Saadia?

The Chair: Ms. Mahdi, yes.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: Yes, thank you.

Definitely the cyber-bullying aspect is very real. With the past year, the pandemic has moved a lot of our kids online. I think that reporting tools would be needed. Not every child is going to go to their parents and open up and tell them what is going on. Like Ms. Hasan mentioned, many parents might not have that language to then go and speak to the educators about it.

For these types of incidents, cyber-bullying, as well as the others we were speaking of before, the reporting has to be something that is accessible, something whereby anything that happens is communicated to the children, to the students, to the educators. Why is such a small percentage of these hate crimes being reported? It needs to be a safe place. People should be able to express what is happening, and they should have the confidence that it will be taken care of and addressed.

I know in our school board, the York Region District School Board, there is a button on the main page of their website called "Report It". Unfortunately, many kids joke that nothing's going to happen and say they don't want to use this button and maybe put themselves in a situation where they are vulnerable and now they've made this claim and nothing's going to be done about it. It falls back onto those in leadership positions to tell the children, the students, that they are going to do something about it and they will address their concerns.

On the policing aspect, if the police are trained with all of these issues we've been talking about—intersectionality and the different types of Muslims, the different types of faces of Muslims—and if they are being told that they need to change their approach, the way they're dealing with these communities because they aren't feeling safe and they are reporting these hateful incidents, I think that would be a good first step. Then it will trickle down to the community.

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you for that insight. That leads to my next question.

If adults feel that there's no use in reporting these hate crimes, especially those against women, that's why they are under-reported. Even the police tell them, "Well, sorry, just stay away from them, and if they come your way, just go away." This doesn't send a good message to those who are under such pressure.

What would you suggest that the justice system should really look into to make sure that no crime is a small crime, that no hate is a small hate? It also helps to prevent what's going to happen to marginalized women and, especially, in our study right now, women of the Muslim faith.

Again, I open this question to both our witnesses.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: Do I have time to answer?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: Thank you.

I'm thinking of the program that we have in Ontario. I don't know if it's in other places, but there's a VIP program that the police conduct in schools. It's about drugs and influences. The acronym stands for "values, influences and peers". The reason it came to my mind is that when a policeman walks into a classroom—especially of sixth graders, let's say—they can create a big impact with what they say. If they go and speak to each classroom and talk about hate crimes and Islamophobia or anti-Black racism, it's going to have a great impact on those young minds.

When we see resources being used for specific areas, we can see the effects. I can see how much that impacted my children and even me as a child in listening to those police officers and talking about making the right choices. If we see that nationally this has become a very big problem, maybe those types of programs need to be done, and they need to be done in a very small one-on-one type of classroom setting. Leaders such as police officers can really make a big difference if they come in and speak about what actually is a hate crime and what would happen if someone felt that way if they were targeted at a young age, and what types of effects that would have on them or, vice versa, on the person who was doing the hate or the cyber-bullying—what would happen to them.

I think it could have a really big impact.

• (1240)

The Chair: Now we're going to Ms. Hutchings.

I think you're sharing your time with Ms. Sidhu and others.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Yes, I'm starting. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As we know, our Muslim community has not even had a chance to recover from the hateful act of terror in London, Ontario. Last week, a Muslim sister wearing her hijab was assaulted in Edmonton. Earlier this week, Baitul Hadi Mosque in Edmonton was vandalized. All these horrible incidents have no place in Canada, and my heart breaks for all victims of these recent attacks. I know that many Canadians are feeling the same.

To all our witnesses today, we know that our marginalized and racialized communities are looking for allies in government, and they are looking for a solution. You shouldn't feel unsafe on the streets in Canada if you are wearing a turban, kippah, hijab, indigenous regalia or any other religious cultural symbol. We need to stand up to reject racism and terror and work together.

The goal of this study in our committee is to find those solutions.

My question is for Ms. Mahdi. Anyone else who wants to can contribute.

I know that your organization advocates for peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths. It is important to understand the root causes of hate. What are some of the differences in experiences with hate crimes when it comes to socio-economic status? You talked about schoolkids. How can we empower them, educate them and give them awareness so that they are empowered to speak up?

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: I think education is key. Spreading information is key, removing myths and misconceptions. As you mentioned, our community holds a lot of public events in which we try to address those misconceptions and try to remove those barriers. However, again, that would be on our platform. It needs to be done on a larger platform. Seeing the House of Commons committee doing this great work is actually very encouraging to us, because definitely you can reach a larger audience within the Canadian community.

It's very important that we understand that the hate comes from a place of ignorance. Unfortunately, going back to the online web pages, Facebook groups or whatever, they're free to express those horrific thoughts, and that's where the radicalization happens. The London, Ontario, attacker being 19 or 20 years old shows that young minds are the ones being influenced the most. Perhaps they have never met a Muslim and haven't actually asked those questions, like, "Oh, I heard this; could you clear it up for me?"

Also, going back to the Quebec mosque shooting, yes, it was addressed. Prime Minister Trudeau addressed it. It was in the media. However, what happened after that? It fell back on the communities to step up their security. We were very scared to go back to the mosque after that, thinking, is that going to happen when our children are attending prayer services? It can't be something that just dies down because the media coverage has died down. It has to be a continuous actual increase in the good, so that we can decrease the bad.

• (1245)

The Chair: Ms. Hasan.

Ms. Samya Hasan: Very quickly, there's one thing I want to point out in terms of the burden on the communities to eradicate the misconceptions. The community feels that it is their responsibility to eradicate those myths, misconceptions and stereotypes, and I really feel that's unfair. We were not the ones who created those misconceptions in the first place, so why should we be responsible for telling people that we're not terrorists? It should come from the top down. It should really come from a campaign from the federal government to show that our communities are welcoming, that we are nice people and we are good citizens of this country. That burden shouldn't fall on the communities themselves.

The other thing I want to point out very quickly is in terms of the previous question on cyber-hate and hate crime reporting. One project we're doing here at CASSA is to work with four different police units across Ontario to see how their hate crime reporting system works at present, where the gaps exist, how the community envisions those programs to be and what would be an accessible way for communities to report hate crimes.

As we know, two-thirds of hate crimes across the country are unreported. How do we change that? We're a small organization. We

can only do so much and work with certain police services across the province. Is there a way for the federal government to take that initiative to work with police units across the country to have a streamlined approach for people to report hate crimes? The second part of it is public education about how to report on hate crimes.

We had an experience a couple of weeks ago where we had an event. There were two people who Zoom-bombed the event with profanities against the speakers. One of them was a South Asian woman. We had a very difficult time trying to find out how to report that to the police. It was a hate incident. It was hate speech, but we were pushed from one department to another department, from one police unit to another police unit. As an organization, we have the resources to assign staff to do that, but as individuals, people don't have the time or the energy to invest hours on end in trying to report the crime, so it's left unreported.

We're really working with the police to see how we can make this system more community friendly and accessible.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Madam Larouche for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony.

I'd like to come back to online hate, of which they spoke. In Quebec, people are talking a lot about it right now. I'd also like to underscore the situation of women in politics. When we talk about education or changing cultures, we often say we need a diversity of faces in politics as well. Some women will not be running in the next municipal campaign in Quebec because they have been victims of online hate. Could any of the witnesses speak to the importance of this legislation, which is overdue at the federal level?

Recently the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security discussed radicalization. Here at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we found that people were spending more time on the Internet during the pandemic.

The witnesses mentioned that people could write anything and everything on social media. I'd like to hear their thoughts about the connection between this time spent online and the importance of legislating on the issue.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Mahdi.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned earlier, representation matters. As a Muslim woman, when I see the wonderful MPs who are now serving Canada who are women of colour, who are Muslims, who wear a hijab, I really feel good about our country and our government. However, when we hear they're being threatened, they're being attacked and they are having to leave their posts, it doesn't bode well for encouraging others to follow in their footsteps. If we see that they are being protected, that those attacks are being taken seriously and the perpetrators are being removed, then we will see more people stepping into those leadership roles and wanting to represent their communities. When we see greater representation among our politicians, we will automatically see a very different face on the leadership of this community.

Already we've done so well, but it needs to be addressed in the future. We can definitely encourage our younger generation to step up and fill those roles.

• (1250)

The Chair: We will have a quick response from Ms. Hasan.

Ms. Samya Hasan: Thank you for that question.

One of the really disturbing statistics I have come across is that there are more than 200 white supremacist, extreme right-wing groups in action right now in Canada. The federal government, as mentioned in the previous panel, has the power to dismantle and disband them. A lot of the online hate comes from those extreme right-wing, white supremacist groups, which are just running freely right now. There needs to be strong action to disband all of those groups.

I assure you, once we do that, there will be a lot less online hate, especially targeting women, racialized women and Muslim women. Online we know that racialized women and Muslim women face a disproportionate amount of cyber-bullying and cyber-hate. Women in general face a lot of hate online.

The answer is in your hands, as the federal government, to disband those 200-plus white supremacist, extreme right-wing groups.

The Chair: Now we go to Ms. Mathysen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I want to return to the discussion on the hate crime units, with policing, that reporting system. I absolutely agree with you, Ms. Hasan, about that public education piece that we don't know. I think part of that, too, comes in with respect to how to report it, but it's also that education around why it's so important to report it. The NDP has also been calling for and wants to move forward on expanding that.

Many smaller cities across Canada, even medium-sized cities and municipalities, don't have anything like a hate crime unit. Could you talk about the importance of the federal government ensuring police units across the country have the funding for specific hate crime units? That's for both witnesses.

Ms. Samya Hasan: I think it's very important. We know that a hate crime is not just something that happens in large cities. We've seen on social media that people who have moved into smaller rural towns during the pandemic have faced a lot of hate and racism in those communities. I stand by having a streamlined approach from the federal government to support police units to establish hate

crime units across the country and to provide those resources that are necessary.

The other important thing is that having a hate crime unit on its own is not enough. We've had police units that have had hate crime units, but the staff that were responsible for that unit were not trained at all on how to handle complaints. It is a very sensitive job to be talking to people who have faced violence in that way, so training is a huge component as well. It's not just resourcing and providing funds for those police units to create hate crime units, but also having a centralized training system for that hate crime staff to take in reports and be sensitive to issues around the different forms of hate that people experience.

The Chair: With the remaining time, I think we have time for one question from Ms. Shin and one question from Mrs. Zahid.

Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you so much.

First, I would like to express my sadness with the recent tragic deaths of the four Muslim family members in London. I so appreciate all the witnesses who are here, in the earlier panel and in this current one, for making time to speak with us today.

I know that with the rise of racism in general, and anti-Asian hate crimes specifically in my part of Canada in the greater Vancouver area, one thing that keeps coming up, and you've touched on this a little bit already [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] charge anyone because you don't have a witness or it wasn't an actual physical form of assault that can be charged. A lot of times victims walk away feeling more angry, very afraid, powerless and that the world is not safe and no one can really do anything about it.

You mentioned the idea of the hate crime unit. Could you provide more details of what kinds of things can be done to help those who are walking away without any justice at that moment?

• (1255)

The Chair: Ms. Hasan.

Ms. Samya Hasan: After talking to different police units in the work that we are doing, one of the biggest barriers in charging someone with a hate crime is the requirement of having Attorney General consent for that to be considered a hate crime. We've asked for some transparency around what is considered a hate crime and what is given Attorney General consent and what is not given Attorney General consent.

As the Anti-Hate Community Leaders Group, we have not advocated for removing that requirement to have Attorney General consent, but to have some more transparency and an annual reporting mechanism of what has been given consent and what has not, so the community can have a better understanding of how that system works. When we have transparency around something, better and consistent principles will be applied to what is considered a hate crime and what is not.

I totally hear you, MP Shin, that there are people who go in to report a hate crime and they are told that, unfortunately, they are not able to consider [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] right now for any crime to be considered a hate crime.

It's looking back at some of those gaps and those policies to see how we can eliminate some of those gaps and how to make the process more transparent. Community groups like CASSA can then [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and educate the community on what they need to do to report hate crimes and what factors they need to fulfill before they go to the police and report hate crimes.

The other thing that was discussed this morning was that third party reporting is so important. As we know, a lot of communities don't have a lot of trust in law enforcement. The Muslim community, especially with Muslim women, are afraid of being shamed and victim-blamed. That is a real thing. We need to really see how we can improve that entire system of reporting, so that communities have better trust in law enforcement when they report hate crimes. If they're not comfortable reporting it to law enforcement, there should be third party mechanisms, like organizations that are doing close work with the community already.

We work with a lot of organizations. Given some resources, they would be more than happy to take on that role to take hate incident reports from their communities because they already have the trust from the community. They would take that and then they would funnel that to the police.

I think a lot of measures can be done to support that process.

The Chair: The final question goes to Ms. Sahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both the witnesses for their important testimony and the recommendations they have given in this important study.

Thank you, Ms. Hasan. We have worked closely in the Scarborough community. All the work you are doing in Scarborough to break down the walls of hatred is very much appreciated.

My question is for both of you.

All members of the Muslim community have been and can be victims of hate crimes, but women are particularly vulnerable. We are more likely to wear traditional clothing, such as hijabs or our

traditional dresses, and therefore, we are more visible targets. I myself was a victim of hate when I started wearing a hijab. With my being the first woman to wear a hijab and speak from the floor of the House of Commons, I think it gives a lot of assurance to our young girls and women who would like to see themselves enter politics wearing a hijab.

No woman or girl should be made afraid to wear what she chooses to wear. What a woman or girl chooses to wear should be her choice and hers alone. It was very sad to talk to a young university student the other day when she told me that she feels scared to stand on a platform of a subway station when wearing a hijab. She stands in a corner in fear that maybe someone could push her or something.

Could you please briefly share what your experiences as a Muslim woman have been? What can we do today, as leaders in our respective communities, to assure all women and girls that they are safe wearing a hijab, and to give them the assurance that wearing a hijab would not stop them from achieving their dreams in whatever fields of life? Many women think that wearing a hijab might be a barrier to getting a good job or entering politics.

I would like to hear your perspective on that issue.

• (1300)

The Chair: Ms. Hasan.

Ms. Samya Hasan: I'll be very quick so I can give Saadia some time to speak as well.

I think what Amira said before she left would send a huge signal to the Muslim community that the federal government is there to support Muslims and hijab-wearing women. Condemn Bill 21. Honestly, that bill has really made Muslim women think they are not part of this country, especially those who live in Quebec, that they're not recognized citizens of this country, that they're not contributing members of this country. They have been made to feel that way.

The strongest signal you can send to Muslim girls who may or may not want to wear a hijab or a niqab is that you will not stand idle and you will not stand silent while a province in our own country passes legislation that violates their constitutional rights. Condemning Bill 21 would be a very, very strong signal.

The Chair: The final comment goes to Ms. Mahdi.

Ms. Saadia Mahdi: I agree completely with what Ms. Hasan has just said.

It was very hurtful to see that a province in Canada could actually successfully pass a bill that was so racist and Islamophobic, and hurtful to all people who wear religious clothing or symbols. Definitely, if the federal government said that this is unconstitutional and it can't be done, that would be a great step. It would also prevent people who felt validated in their hateful opinions by the passing of that bill if it would say that no, Canada's not going to tolerate it.

In going back to MP Zahid, it warms my heart when I see a fellow hijab-wearing woman in your position. It is very inspiring. When I was young, it wasn't something that I actually ever thought possible. We were okay with the old white men being in charge of the government. Slowly we saw more representation from women, and then slowly, women of colour, and now Muslim women. You guys really are trailblazers. We wish you well. We're with you.

Definitely, when our kids see representation, even something small, like if they see a commercial on TV and there's a woman wearing a hijab, for whatever reason, it gives them such pleasure to

see that we are being represented. That's something we didn't have when I was growing up. It is a great responsibility on your shoulders, but we are with you and we are very thankful that you have chosen this line of work. Wherever these hateful things creep up, it is now your responsibility to make sure that they are shot back down and they're not allowed to fester and grow.

● (1305)

The Chair: That was very well said.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today. This is a great study and we will continue. There's lots more to talk about.

For the committee members, on Tuesday we'll discuss committee business and the work plan for this important report. At this point, is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

I'm seeing lots of nods.

Then I shall see you on Tuesday. Have a great day.

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