

# Muslim issues not adequately addressed in party platforms, argues advocacy group campaigning for dedicated federal anti-Islamophobia office

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By Jesse Cnockaert September 20, 2021

**Advocacy organization the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC) launched on Sept. 10, and is campaigning for the federal government to develop an office dedicated to combating Islamophobia in Canada.**



Revenue Minister Diane LeBouthillier requested that the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson investigate concerns about CRA audits facing Muslim-led charities, following a national summit on Islamophobia, held virtually on July 22. The Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, which launched on Sept. 10, argues this investigation is 'limited in scope.' *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

A new advocacy organization is arguing the federal parties aren't making sufficient promises related to combating hate crimes against Muslims, and is campaigning for whichever party wins the election to develop an office for combating Islamophobia.

“We don’t think Islamophobia or issues related to Canadian Muslims are being adequately addressed in party platforms. We would have liked to see more concrete commitments, and we don’t see that,” said Sarah Mushtaq, a spokesperson for the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC). “We’ve seen the rise of anti-Semitism, of anti-Asian hate crimes, and then specifically Islamophobia. The idea of having this federal office with resources and funding would be [to look] at these issues in a way where we can actually address them from a systemic perspective.”

The CMPAC, a lobby organization dedicated to advancing the interests of Canada’s Muslim population, launched on Sept. 10. Advocacy priorities for the organization include urging the federal government to implement a strategy to address online hate, and to create a federal office that would develop and implement an anti-Islamophobia strategy. The CMPAC is looking for a commitment of \$5 million towards a federal anti-Islamophobia office, according to Ms. Mushtaq.

Police-reported hate crimes in Canada reached 2,669 incidents in 2020, representing a 37 per cent increase compared to the 1,951 police-reported hate crimes in 2019, according to Statistics Canada. About 46 per cent of Canadians have an unfavorable view of Islam—more than for any other religious tradition—according to a report on Islamophobia in Canada submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur in Freedom of Religion or Belief on Nov. 30, 2020. The report was submitted by the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, the Islamic Social Services Association, and the Noor Cultural Centre.

“We believe that having an office to address Islamophobia could help address these issues in a more fulsome, systemic way, and address hate crimes across the country instead of just kind of letting communities individually deal with them,” said Ms. Mushtaq. “Having this national framework to address hate crimes would be really helpful to ensure that no community is left behind.”

As part of the launch, the CMPAC released a comparison of the various federal parties’ platforms in the 2021 election, which highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each party when it comes to addressing issues such as Islamophobia, systemic racism and immigration.

The Liberal Party platform failed to address specific asks of the Muslim community based on the input gathered during the National Action Summit on Islamophobia, according to the CMPAC platform comparison. The summit, held virtually on July 22, provided a platform for Muslim communities to discuss ways to combat Islamophobia in Canada. The Liberal platform has not included any proposal to help prevent



Sarah Mushtaq is a spokesperson for the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC). ‘We believe that having an office to address Islamophobia could help

Muslim charities from being targeted by audits from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), which was the “number one” issue raised at the summit, according to the CMPAC. Muslim-led charities are “exceptionally vulnerable to audits” and to the revocation of their charitable status, according to [a report](#) released on March 29 by the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Institute of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto.

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*Photograph courtesy of the CMPAC*

On Aug. 5, Minister of National Revenue Diane LeBoutillier announced that Taxpayers’ Ombudsperson François Boileau will investigate the concerns of Muslim charities in their experiences with the CRA. An update on Boileau’s examination is expected to be provided to the National Revenue minister on Jan. 1, 2022, according to an Aug. 5 [press release](#).

“Together with my office, I commit to examining the concerns raised and will engage charitable organizations led by racialized communities to ensure that the service rights we so strongly represent, are upheld by the CRA. But before we take action, we need to take the time to listen and deepen our knowledge of the issues,” said Mr. Boileau in the press release.

The CMPAC said on its website that Boileau’s review is “non-binding and limited in scope,” and criticized the Liberal government for not proposing any reforms in its platform to address the issues facing Muslim-led charities.

As examples of how the Liberals are addressing Islamophobia in their election platform, the CMPAC lists the party’s plan to present a national action plan for combating hate by 2022 as part of an anti-racism strategy, and a proposal to increase investments in the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence to combat hate crime.

The CMPAC argues that the NDP platform makes numerous mention of Islamophobia in addressing hate speech and crimes, but, similar to the Liberals, has not included a commitment to address CRA audits of Muslim-led charities.

Regarding the Conservatives, the CMPAC comparison document argues the party’s platform makes no direct mention of Islamophobia. Steps proposed by the Conservatives that could relate to combating Islamophobia includes a plan to fight online incitement and hatred by criminalizing statements that encourage violence.

Ms. Mushtaq said that the CMPAC plans to register on the federal lobbyists’ registry following the federal election on Sept. 20.

Other organizations currently active on the federal lobbyists’ registry related to advocacy for Muslims includes the Muslim Association of Canada and the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

“The Muslim community is not monolithic. It’s a large community and there’s room, as the community continues to grow, for multiple organizations serving the interest of the community together,” said Ms. Mushtaq. “We definitely want to work together. There might be some things that one organization works on, but there’s definitely going to be a lot of work together behind the scenes, as well.”

Islamophobia was the subject of headlines during the 2021 election, when Lisa Robinson, the Conservative candidate in the Toronto riding of Beaches–East York, was dismissed from the party on Sept. 10 for allegedly posting anti-Islamic statements on social media years prior.

Liberal candidate Nathaniel Erskine-Smith posted a tweet on Sept. 10 containing screenshots from a Twitter account called “Ward 1 city councillor candidate,” which contained derogatory comments towards Muslims living in Canada. In his Twitter post, Mr. Erskine-Smith said that “Ward 1 city councillor candidate’ is none other than Lisa Robinson.”

Ms. Robinson told The Canadian press she is still running as a “confirmed Conservative” candidate despite being officially dropped by the Party. She claims that she never wrote the online posts that led to her dismissal from the Conservatives. In a Twitter post response to Mr. Erskine-Smith, Ms. Robinson said that the Ward 1 city councillor candidate account was fake, and she had reported it to Durham Regional Police in 2018. She also said in her Twitter post that sharing “false information is defamatory” and that Erskine-Smith would receive a libel notice soon.

“They posted a fake picture, claimed that it must be true, and asked me—the victim, to provide proof that it is fake,” said Ms. Robinson in a statement on her campaign website. “If this can be done to me, then it can be done to anyone. Would you want your children subjected to this kind of abuse? If an elected official can spread false information and blame the victim candidate, what else can they be capable of?”

In an emailed statement to *The Hill Times*, Mr. Erskine-Smith said he would be “open to correcting the record if there is credible information.”

“When I initially saw Lisa’s claim that the account is fake, I privately messaged her and asked her if she had flagged it for Twitter. She said she’d never done so because of a lack of computer literacy, but that she eventually had it removed with the help of a friend. When I



Candidate Lisa Robinson for the Toronto riding of Beaches–East York was dismissed from the Conservative Party on Sept. 10. *Photograph courtesy of lifelibertyandlisa.ca*

asked specifically how that had happened, she stopped responding to me,” said Mr. Erskine-Smith in the email. “I’ve now seen past posts of hers in which she has apologized for remarks, and also in which she has claimed she was hacked. None of it adds up.”

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