



CANADIAN MUSLIM
PUBLIC AFFAIRS
COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 2026

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM IN CANADA

**Report Submission to Dr. Ashwini K.P., United
Nations Special Rapporteur on
contemporary forms of racism, racial
discrimination, xenophobia and related
intolerance**

Addressing Systemic Islamophobia and Anti-Palestinian Racism in Canada

Prepared by the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC) for Dr. Ashwini K.P., United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

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Executive Summary

Canada has had the highest number of targeted killings of Muslims motivated by Islamophobia among G7 countries, underscoring the severity of anti-Muslim hate and the need for sustained government action. Muslim communities continue to experience Islamophobia through public policy, security and regulatory systems, institutional decision-making, workplaces, public spaces and restrictions on civic participation. It is important for existing frameworks to be translated into measurable, community-informed institutional reform. The Government of Canada has developed important anti-racism strategies, primarily through Canadian Heritage. However, existing frameworks must be translated into measurable, community-informed institutional reform that addresses both interpersonal and systemic forms of Islamophobia.

This brief draws on [*CMPAC's Combatting Islamophobia: A Policy Handbook*](#) to examine systemic Islamophobia in Canada and identify priority areas for anti-racism policy and institutional reform. It examines the measurable impact of Islamophobia on Canadian Muslims, highlights the relationship between interpersonal hate and systemic discrimination, recognizes federal measures already in place, and identifies priority actions for Canada consistent with equality, civil liberties and international human rights obligations. The brief also addresses anti-Palestinian racism (APR) as a distinct but intersecting form of racism that requires explicit recognition within Canada's anti-racism architecture. While APR can intersect with Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, it must not be reduced to either.

CMPAC calls for a stronger federal approach that moves beyond responding to individual incidents of hate toward identifying and correcting the institutional structures, policies and practices through which Islamophobia is produced. This requires stronger accountability across federal institutions, reform of national-security and regulatory systems, protection of civil liberties and democratic participation, improved data and redress mechanisms, and sustained investment in Muslim-led anti-racism initiatives.

Current Federal Measures to Address Racism and Discrimination

CMPAC recognizes that Canada has established a significant number of policies aimed at addressing racism. [*Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2028*](#) commits \$110.4 million and brings together more than 70 federal initiatives across 20 organizations. Its priorities include racial equity in immigration, health and housing; reform of justice, law-enforcement, intelligence and public-safety systems; economic, social and cultural empowerment; and international engagement.

- The Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat coordinates whole-of-government action and promotes an Anti-Racism Framework intended to identify systemic barriers and unintended bias in federal policies, programs and services.
- The Strategy promises public reporting, common indicators, an annual Anti-Racism Report Card, community-to-government policy input and stronger intergovernmental coordination.

- The Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Program and the Action Plan on Combatting Hate fund community initiatives, research and efforts addressing racism, discrimination and hate.
- [Parliamentary](#) and [government](#) reports have already recognized Islamophobia as systemic and called for institutional accountability, improved data, community partnership, education and protection of civil liberties.

Gaps in Federal Policy Implementation

These measures are important, but their existence has not yet produced consistent accountability across federal institutions. Muslim communities continue to report unequal treatment in national-security practices, border and immigration enforcement, charitable regulation, financial services and public institutions.

While federal initiatives address anti-Muslim hate and discrimination, [parliamentary](#) and [government](#) findings demonstrate that Islamophobia also operates at a systemic level through institutional policies, practices, actions and omissions. Addressing Islamophobia therefore requires sustained attention not only to individual incidents of hate, but also to the institutional structures and decision-making processes that can produce discriminatory outcomes for Muslim communities. A universal anti-racism framework will remain incomplete if it does not identify how particular forms of racism operate, assign responsibility for correcting them and publicly measure outcomes.

Islamophobia as a Form of Systemic Racism

[CMPAC's Islamophobia Policy Handbook](#) draws on the [Senate Human Rights Committee](#), the [House of Commons Justice Committee](#) and [federal guidance on Islamophobia](#). Their findings demonstrate that Islamophobia is not confined to prejudice or hate crimes. It can be produced through laws, policies, administrative practices, political narratives and institutional omissions, including where formally neutral rules generate unequal outcomes.

Systemic Islamophobia can [affect](#) how Muslims interact with national-security institutions, law enforcement, border and immigration systems, charitable regulators, financial institutions, employers and public bodies. It can also [affect](#) whether Muslims are able to exercise freedom of religion, expression, association and peaceful assembly without being subjected to disproportionate suspicion or scrutiny. Addressing Islamophobia therefore requires more than responding to individual incidents after they occur. It requires examining the institutional structures and decision-making processes that shape how Muslim communities are perceived, governed and treated.

The Impact of Islamophobia on Canadian Muslims

Islamophobia has measurable consequences for the safety, equality and participation of Muslim communities across Canada. These impacts extend beyond individual acts of hate. They are experienced in workplaces, public spaces and institutions and through barriers affecting the ability of Muslims to participate equally in Canadian society.

a. Community Safety and Daily Experiences

Police-reported [hate-crime data](#) demonstrate the continuing threat facing Muslim communities. Statistics Canada recorded 229 police-reported hate crimes targeting Muslims in 2024, compared with 84 in 2020, an increase of approximately 173% over five years. The recent figures also remain persistently high, with 220 incidents recorded in 2023. In 2024, Muslims accounted for approximately 17% of police-reported hate crimes targeting religion. These figures, however, capture only incidents reported to and classified by police and therefore do not represent the full extent of Islamophobia experienced by Muslim communities.

CMPAC has also documented the continuing frequency of incidents affecting Muslim communities. In July 2026, CMPAC identified [at least six](#) Islamophobic incidents within approximately one month across several Canadian cities. Their geographic spread demonstrates that concerns about Islamophobia are not confined to a single city or province.

The impact extends beyond hate crimes. The [2024 Survey of Muslims in Canada](#) found that approximately 42% of Canadian Muslims reported experiencing religious-based discrimination, compared with approximately 13% of non-Muslim Canadians. Nearly half reported discrimination based on ethnicity (48%) or race (46%), while approximately 31% reported appearance-based discrimination.

These findings demonstrate the intersectional character of Islamophobia. Muslim Canadians can experience discrimination simultaneously on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, language, gender and visible expressions of Muslim identity. This distinction is particularly important when evaluating systemic Islamophobia. Experiences of unequal treatment may never be recorded as hate crimes but can nevertheless affect access to employment, services, institutions and opportunities.

b. Employment and Economic Participation

Employment is another significant area of concern. [Research](#) by Islamic Relief Canada on Canadian Muslims found that 67% of participants reported experiencing formal discrimination in the workplace and 84% reported informal discrimination. Experiences documented in the research included barriers to career advancement, stereotyping, exclusion and difficulties associated with religious identity and accommodation. Related [Statistics Canada data](#) also demonstrate the intersection between anti-Arab discrimination and Islamophobia. Among Arab Canadians surveyed in 2020, 38.9% had experienced discrimination during the preceding six years. Among Arab Muslims specifically, 31.6% reported experiencing discrimination based on religion.

c. Trust, Participation and Belonging

The consequences of discrimination extend to Canadians' relationships with public institutions. [Statistics Canada found](#) that Arabs who had experienced discrimination were less likely than those who had not experienced discrimination to report high confidence in several Canadian institutions, including Parliament, police, banks and Canadian media. Islamophobia must therefore be understood not only through individual incidents but through its cumulative effects

on personal safety, economic participation, freedom of religion and expression, access to institutions, confidence in public systems and the ability to participate fully in Canadian civic life. These impacts reinforce the need for federal responses that address both anti-Muslim hate and the institutional and systemic conditions through which Islamophobia can be reproduced.

Main Areas of Concern:

- **Security-based suspicion and profiling:** Muslim identity can be subjected to security-based suspicion or associated with heightened security risk, contributing to surveillance, secondary screening, border scrutiny and differential treatment.
- **Border, immigration and public-safety discretion:** Broad discretion, limited transparency and weak independent review can make discriminatory patterns difficult to identify and remedy.
- **Charitable and financial regulation:** Muslim-led charities and humanitarian organizations face [concerns](#) about disproportionate audits, opaque risk assessments, de-risking, loss of banking services and unclear compliance rules for work in conflict-affected areas.
- **Civil liberties and democratic participation:** Anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian bias can restrict expression, association, protest and participation in public debate, including through professional or institutional reprisals.
- **Data and redress:** Police-reported hate-crime data alone do not capture systemic discrimination, institutional complaints or the underreporting experienced by affected communities.
- **Employment and workplace discrimination:** Anti-Muslim discrimination can affect hiring, career advancement, workplace inclusion and religious accommodation, limiting equal economic participation for Muslim Canadians.

The Need for Explicit Recognition of Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR)

APR can silence, exclude, erase, stereotype, defame or dehumanize Palestinians and Palestinian narratives. It can affect Palestinians as well as people and organizations advocating for Palestinian human rights. Its manifestations include denial or erasure of Palestinian history and identity, unequal treatment of Palestinian perspectives, justification or minimization of violence against Palestinians, and the conflation of lawful criticism of Israeli state policy with hatred against Jewish people.

APR intersects with Islamophobia but is not reducible to it alone. Palestinians are religiously diverse, and anti-Palestinian discrimination also affects non-Palestinian advocates. An effective framework must therefore recognize these intersections while preserving APR as a separately identifiable form of racism. Addressing APR and antisemitism should be mutually reinforcing: both require careful definitions, contextual assessment, protection from discrimination and firm safeguards for lawful political expression.

Why APR Belongs within Canada's Anti-Racism Architecture

- The House of Commons Justice Committee heard evidence of rising Islamophobia, anti-Arab discrimination and APR, including threats, harassment, workplace consequences and restrictions on civil liberties.
- The federal Anti-Racism Strategy already commits to community-led, intersectional and system-focused action. Explicit APR measures would apply those principles to a documented gap.
- Failure to name APR can render Palestinian experiences invisible in data, complaint systems, institutional training and policy evaluation, weakening prevention and accountability.

Human-rights concern: When institutions treat Muslim or Palestinian identity and advocacy primarily through a security lens, equality rights and the freedoms of expression, religion, association and peaceful assembly are placed at risk.

Recommendations

CMPAC respectfully recommends the following from the Government of Canada:

1. Create a Federal Implementation and Accountability Framework on Islamophobia

Translate existing federal and parliamentary commitments on Islamophobia into department-specific responsibilities, timelines, measurable indicators and publicly reported outcomes. Federal departments and agencies should be required to identify and address policies, administrative practices and institutional processes that produce unequal outcomes for Muslim communities.

2. Build Permanent Federal Capacity to Address Systemic Islamophobia

Establish dedicated and permanent expertise within Canada's federal anti-racism architecture to coordinate action on Islamophobia, maintain institutional knowledge, monitor implementation and strengthen accountability across departments and agencies. This capacity should focus on substantive institutional reform rather than symbolic or temporary initiatives.

3. Address Islamophobia within National-Security and Law-Enforcement Systems

Establish independent and transparent mechanisms to examine how national-security, counterterrorism, law-enforcement and related risk-assessment frameworks affect Muslim communities. Reviews should examine discriminatory profiling, security-based suspicion, disproportionate scrutiny and the use of broad institutional discretion, while developing safeguards to protect civil liberties.

4. Strengthen CBSA Accountability and Address Border Profiling

Build stronger independent oversight, transparency and safeguards around border screening and enforcement, including secondary screening, questioning and other discretionary practices that may disproportionately affect Muslims.

Publish disaggregated findings where appropriate and establish corrective action plans where discriminatory patterns are identified.

5. Address Discriminatory Oversight of Muslim Charities

Review federal terrorist-financing, charitable regulation and risk-assessment frameworks to identify and correct practices that may disproportionately affect Muslim-led charities and humanitarian organizations.

Create transparent standards, procedural safeguards and meaningful avenues for review and redress.

6. Address Financial Exclusion and De-Risking

Examine barriers experienced by Muslim individuals, charities and organizations in accessing banking and financial services, including account closures, transaction restrictions and opaque risk assessments.

Establish greater transparency, procedural fairness and accessible mechanisms for challenging adverse decisions.

7. Protect Civil Liberties and Democratic Participation

Establish clear federal safeguards and guidance to protect freedom of religion, expression, association, peaceful assembly and lawful political participation within areas of federal jurisdiction. Anti-racism, anti-hate and national-security measures should incorporate safeguards against disproportionate surveillance, scrutiny or restriction of Muslim communities and lawful Muslim civic advocacy.

8. Establish Islamophobia-Specific Data and Accountability Mechanisms

Build federal mechanisms capable of measuring systemic Islamophobia beyond police-reported hate crimes. Data and research should examine discrimination in public services, immigration and border systems, employment, financial services, charitable regulation and institutional decision-making. Indicators should be developed with affected communities and accompanied by strong privacy and civil-liberties protections.

9. Strengthen Complaint, Review and Redress Mechanisms

Create accessible pathways through which Muslim individuals and organizations can challenge discriminatory treatment by federal institutions. Where adverse decisions affect immigration status, charitable activity, financial access, security screening or access to public services, affected individuals and organizations should have access to clear reasons, meaningful independent review and appropriate remedies.

10. Establish Dedicated and Predictable Funding to Combat Islamophobia

Create dedicated and sustained funding within federal anti-racism and anti-hate programs for Muslim-led research, education, legal assistance, community capacity, public awareness, youth engagement and initiatives addressing both interpersonal and systemic Islamophobia.

11. Strengthen Education, Employment and Institutional Responses to Islamophobia

Build sustained public education and institutional training addressing anti-Muslim stereotypes and the systemic dimensions of Islamophobia, including narratives that associate Muslim identity with extremism, violence or inherent security risk.

Establish measures within federal workplaces and federally regulated sectors to address anti-Muslim discrimination in hiring, career advancement, workplace inclusion and religious accommodation.

Develop clear guidance and accountability mechanisms to identify discriminatory workplace practices and strengthen equal participation for Muslim employees. Federal initiatives should be developed in meaningful partnership with Muslim communities and organizations.

12. Explicitly Recognize and Operationalize Anti-Palestinian Racism

Develop a rights-protective federal framework for identifying and addressing APR in consultation with Palestinian communities and anti-racism experts. The framework should inform federal data collection, training, grants, complaint mechanisms and policy review while protecting lawful political expression and distinguishing antisemitism from lawful criticism of Israeli government policies.

13. Recognize the Intersection of Islamophobia, Anti-Arab Racism and APR

Federal anti-racism policy should recognize that Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism and APR can intersect, particularly where Muslim, Arab and Palestinian identity or advocacy is treated through a security lens. Federal responses should recognize these intersections without collapsing distinct forms of racism into one another.

Requested Engagement by the Special Rapporteur

CMPAC respectfully invites the Special Rapporteur to consider these concerns in her engagement with the Government of Canada. This could include seeking information on the implementation and measurable outcomes of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy and federal commitments to combat Islamophobia; examining the experiences of Muslim communities across national-security, border and immigration, charitable, financial, employment and public-sector systems; and assessing whether existing federal accountability and redress mechanisms adequately identify and address systemic Islamophobia.

CMPAC further invites the Special Rapporteur to examine the experiences of Palestinian communities, as well as advocates for Palestinian human rights, including the intersection between Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism and anti-Palestinian racism. CMPAC encourages the adoption of clear, time-bound and publicly reported measures capable of translating Canada's existing anti-racism commitments into measurable institutional change.