CANADIAN MUSLIM
PUBLIC AFFAIRS
COUNCIL

CMPAC POLICY BRIEF

OCTOBER 2026

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CMPAC Policy Brief: October 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent policy developments across immigration, national security, digital policy, public safety, and foreign relations carry important implications for constitutional rights, humanitarian commitments, and Canadian Muslim communities. Federal action must remain anchored in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, international law, and principles of equality, procedural fairness, and institutional accountability.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) reflects an increasingly discriminatory stance, marked by administrative inefficiencies, expanded claim ineligibilities under Bill C-12, and chronic processing delays. These barriers are apparent in the Gaza Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) program, where families face unfeasible biometric hurdles and severe backlogs, as well as in study permit delays confronting accepted Palestinian scholars. Reestablishing a rights-based immigration framework is essential to restore predictability and humanitarian integrity.

Bill C-22, the Lawful Access Act, currently under Senate second reading debate (October 8, 2026), significantly expands digital surveillance authorities through reduced authorization thresholds, mandatory six-month metadata retention, encryption risks, and secret ministerial capability orders that protect racialized and Muslim communities. Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, broadens definitions of violent extremism beyond Criminal Code standards, threatening constitutionally protected online expression and political advocacy.

The preliminary findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism providing international documentation of systemic discrimination in Canada. The Special Rapporteur's recognition of systemic Islamophobia directly reinforces CMPAC's work to dismantle structural racism, affirming Islamophobia operates as a systemic mechanism across national security frameworks, border screening, and Canada Revenue Agency audits targeting Muslim charities. The findings further endorse CMPAC's calls to formally recognize Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) as a distinct form of racism, condemn state-sanctioned discrimination under Quebec's Bill 21, and oppose the pre-emptive invocation of Section 33 notwithstanding clauses.

In foreign policy, Canada must move beyond short-term relief toward a long-term reconstruction framework for Gaza and Syria. This requires advocating for unhindered humanitarian access, lifting the Gaza blockade, reviewing economic sanctions on Syria, and investing in civilian

infrastructure, healthcare, and community-driven recovery to uphold international obligations and constitutional principles.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Systemic Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian Racism, and the UN Special Rapporteur

While the federal government projects inclusive multiculturalism, the preliminary findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism reflect the extensive evidence of systemic discrimination compiled by Canadian Muslim communities and pro-Palestinian advocacy groups. These findings mirror CMPAC's policy research showing that statutory anti-racism frameworks fail to protect Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab communities from institutional targeting, while reinforcing CMPAC's work to dismantle systemic Islamophobia and formally recognize Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) as a distinct form of racism.

Finally, state-sanctioned secularism laws like Quebec's Bill 21 actively marginalize religious minorities. CMPAC aligns with the UN Special Rapporteur in calling for the immediate repeal of discriminatory secularism regimes and opposing the pre-emptive invocation of Section 33 notwithstanding clauses to shield discriminatory legislation from judicial review.

Recommendations:

- The federal government must transition from symbolic anti-racism recognition to enforceable policy, institutionalizing combatting Islamophobia and Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) as a distinct forms of discrimination, recognizing the Nakba in educational curricula, and enacting statutory anti-reprisal protections for individuals advocating for Palestinian human rights.
- Federal leadership should advocate against discriminatory secularism legislation like Quebec's Bill 21, ban the pre-emptive invocation of Section 33 notwithstanding clauses, and establish a dedicated law enforcement framework to combat transnational repression targeting diaspora communities.
- Federal institutions should mandate anti-bias standards in public media, implement binding anti-racism accountability mechanisms across departments, provide trauma-informed support for arriving Palestinian families, and establish targeted initiatives to address compound discrimination facing Black Muslims and visibly Muslim women.

2. Immigration Policy and Ministerial Accountability

Systemic governance challenges within Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) extend beyond processing backlogs to reveal an increasingly restrictive, unpredictable, and opaque operational framework. Across refugee determination, temporary streams, student permits, family reunification, and emergency pathways, applicants face chronic delays, elevated refusal rates, inconsistent adjudications, and a lack of transparency regarding the legal grounds for rejection. These barriers carry ramifications for Canadian Muslim communities, whose immediate family members, academic partners, and humanitarian contacts frequently reside in

regions impacted by armed conflict, foreign occupation, authoritarianism, and systemic displacement. Applicants originating from Muslim-majority nations continue to experience additional security screening, discriminatory profiling, and heightened structural hurdles that directly compromise family unity, higher education, access to safety, and humanitarian protection.

These systemic vulnerabilities are further compounded by Bill C-12 provisions that expand refugee claim ineligibility, threatening access to individualized protection assessments. Nowhere is this administrative failure clearer than in the Gaza Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) program, where fewer than 970 individuals have successfully reached Canada while an estimated 500 applicants have died awaiting processing in active war zones, alongside 130 accepted Palestinian scholars trapped abroad due to study permit delays.

Recommendations:

- The Prime Minister should initiate an independent review of IRCC management, restore structured engagement with civil society organizations, and mandate clear public reporting on processing times, refusal trends, and operational guidance across all immigration streams.
- The federal government must ensure refugee eligibility provisions under Bill C-12 strictly comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and international obligations, backed by mandatory civil society consultations and parliamentary implementation reviews.
- IRCC must immediately overhaul emergency humanitarian pathways by expanding eligibility, accelerating Gaza TRV processing, waiving impractical biometric and documentation rules in active war zones, ensuring family unity at the border, and approving outstanding study permits for 130 accepted Palestinian scholars without delay.

3. Legislative Concerns and Recommendations

Bill C-22, the Lawful Access Act, introduced for second reading debate in the Senate on October 8, 2026, significantly expands digital surveillance authorities. Reduced authorization thresholds, mandatory six-month metadata retention, risks to end-to-end encryption, and secret ministerial capability orders exempt from parliamentary review present major structural risks. Without robust statutory safeguards, these measures create systemic cybersecurity vulnerabilities and normalize intrusive surveillance that disproportionately affects marginalized, racialized, and Canadian Muslim communities.

Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, broadens definitions of violent extremism beyond Criminal Code standards while imposing heavy content-moderation mandates on commercial platforms. These vague legal definitions force technology companies to over-censor lawful speech, directly threatening constitutionally protected political advocacy, journalism, religious expression, and human rights defense.

Recommendations:

- The Senate of Canada should pause Bill C-22 to conduct a constitutional review, amending the legislation to enforce strict judicial authorization, eliminate secret ministerial capability orders, safeguard end-to-end encryption, and establish independent oversight.
- Parliament must amend Bill C-34 to strictly align violent extremism definitions with Criminal Code standards, incorporate explicit statutory protections for lawful advocacy, dissent, and journalism, and mandate independent oversight over commercial content moderation in ongoing consultation with civil liberties and affected community groups.

4. Recommendations Related to Palestine and Syria Policy Development and Reconstruction of Gaza and Syria

Canada's foreign policy engagement in Gaza and Syria must transition from emergency relief toward sustained reconstruction, economic recovery, and long-term development. A comprehensive contribution requires restoring essential civilian infrastructure in direct coordination with trusted multilateral partners, local institutions, and experienced Canadian development organizations. Rebuilding physical assets alone is insufficient; federal strategy must prioritize community-driven economic recovery, healthcare capacity building, education, and local governance to foster long-term stability for affected Palestinian and Syrian communities.

To ensure reconstruction is effective, Canada must pair aid with decisive diplomatic action to remove structural barriers. Regarding Gaza, Canada must advocate for lifting the blockade, securing unhindered humanitarian access, enforcing compliance with international law, and making dedicated investments to rebuild Gaza’s devastated health sector.

Recommendations:

- In Syria, the government of Canada should review and lift economic sanctions that unnecessarily impede civilian reconstruction, economic recovery, and basic humanitarian assistance, ensuring federal policy facilitates.
- Global Affairs Canada should support long-term recovery in Gaza and Syria by rebuilding essential civilian infrastructure, healthcare, housing, and water systems in direct coordination with trusted multilateral partners, local communities, and experienced Canadian humanitarian organizations.
- The federal government must pair reconstruction aid with diplomatic action by advocating for lifting the Gaza blockade, securing humanitarian access, and reviewing Canadian sanctions on Syria that impede economic recovery, aid delivery, and public services.