

IMAM DR ZIJAD DELIC SPEECH FOR IHMC ~ FOR THE RECORD

"From Imam Zijad Delic to Canadians who may be interested on what my message would have been to Defense HQ on Oct. 4th if the presentation was not cancelled by the Hon. Minister Peter MacKay"

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Dear Fellow Canadians;

In light of maintaining a transparent and open dialogue with my fellow Canadians, I am forthwith attaching a copy of my speech which is consistent with previous appearances across Canada and with other Government agencies.

My intention was / is / and will be in the future to improve understanding of Islam and Muslims' relationships to other Canadians, respecting the Canada's Charter of Rights and the rule of law.

Although this engagement was confirmed in the first week of September, I was saddened to receive the news of its cancellation through a reporter, not directly from the Dept. of National Defence.

Likewise, it was unfortunate that there was no discussion with me about the allegations of my perceived beliefs. Nonetheless, I maintain an open line of communication with anyone that has concerns.

The decision of the Hon. Minister MacKay will not shake my trust in Canada; I will continue doing what I did and live with hopes that the Hon. Minister will be careful when making future decisions which could have a potential negative impact on cohesion of our nation. I appreciate that he felt he was performing a role in relation to the security of Canada and I share his concerns- if those concerns are based on facts and the accused are given a chance to clear any misunderstandings.

I thank those who have been supportive and who, notwithstanding differences of opinion which exist everywhere, are prepared to have a civilized, respectful, honest dialogue which would be in keeping with the dignity Canada encourages among all of its citizens of which myself and my family are proud to be. Canada is our home. All families have quarrels. My hope and ambition is to contribute in a positive way to the family of Canadians to continue to make Canada a safe and free society. If voices of moderation are silenced, this will not be in the best interests of the security of Canada and its reputation as a country where people work together for common goals with diverse background. I thank Canada for the opportunity to be part of its diversity."

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CANADIAN CITIZENS OF MUSLIM FAITH: ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

Introduction

Since the middle of the 19th century when the first Muslims arrived in Canada, Canadian Muslims and their children (second or third generations) have made significant moves towards embracing and adapting to a liberal democratic society.

Some, like myself, have come from war-torn countries, or places that are authoritarian. Some have faced persecution and have seen tyranny first hand.

To adjust to living in a place of safety doesn't always come easily. Many hold romantic ideals about going 'back home' in order to make a positive change in a broken society. Because of Canada's warmth (not literally, because we all feel the cold in winter!), but because of its hospitable people, Canada becomes 'home' very quickly.

Fortunately, embracing democratic values is compatible with the faith of Islam, and it is incumbent upon every Muslim to become an active member of society to enrich the place they live.

Profile of Canada

Canada is a country of vibrant diversity, with its indigenous peoples and the founding British and French groups. Canada has become home in the second half of the 20th century, to a wide variety of ethno-cultural groups, making up the mosaic of Canada's current population. In fact, Canada has attracted diverse groups from all corners of the world. It is in so many ways a land of immigrants and their children who together comprise one of the world's leading democratic multicultural societies. Canada is held, as Vasta asserts, "as the showpiece of multiculturalism".

While cultural and religious pluralism in western societies is a reality, in Canada, it is even more so. Indeed, according to a study conducted, Canadian approaches to diversity naturally reflect a Canadian reality of several regional, communal and personal identities, in addition to the national identity. Bowlby asserts that newcomers to Canada have always brought their religious beliefs, practices, conceptions of community and institutions with them, adding their distinctive richness to Canada's multicultural mosaic.

Among the many factors that characterize a multicultural society, religion plays a dominant role in the formation of personal and communal ethnic identity. Max Weber and Emile Durkheim hold that "religion is necessary to a society as a vital mechanism of integration for human beings and as a means to unify symbols". Other scholars have emphasized the importance of religion as a vital source of ethnic identity. According to a study conducted in the 70's, "religion defines ... [humanity's] place in the universe." Another scholar also suggests that the defiance of religious practice or beliefs means stepping outside one's boundaries or place and thus "outside of one's own identity."

Religious diversity is a fact of life in Canadian society, as is the diversity of our many races and ethnicities. I believe Canada is unique, in that it actively encourages all citizens to preserve their heritage as part of the cultural mosaic. I think Canada's warmth is in part because of that encouragement of diversity. Canadian people are comfortable with their own identity, but equally curious about other cultures, foods and faiths.

Religion occupies a significant position in Canada's 1982 constitutional framework. Within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, everyone is entitled to freedom of religion and belief and guarantees this basic freedom. In 1985, the Supreme Court ruled that freedom of religion under the Charter at least includes freedom of religious speech, including "the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest religious belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination".

Profile of Canadian Muslims

Over the past three decades, a large number of Muslims have made Canada their home, bringing along various cultural and religious expressions of their home countries. These people who adhered to Islam, moved from areas that were predominately Muslim, to Canada where those adhering to Islam is only a small minority. Some of the challenges are internal to Canada – from the basic physical challenges that all immigrants go through, like adapting to the colder climates, wondering where to get food and how to take the bus, to things like accommodating to a different national culture, reframing one's personal identity, and coming to terms with being different to first and second generation Muslims.

Other challenges are external – dealing with systemic Islamophobia, discrimination and/or racism. In response to these challenges, modern Muslim intellectuals and leaders reject the concept of being regarded as the "other" in Canadian society and prefer to preserve distinct Islamic values, so that the soul is at peace, but simultaneously find ways to integrate Muslims more fully into Canadian society.

During the last three decades, the necessity for the constructive integration of Muslims has grown exponentially, with their emergence as a national group with presence in every province and major city. But this does not mean that they are by any means a recent addition to Canada's ethnic and religious mosaic. Although the majority of Muslims arrived in Canada within the last three decades, smaller numbers have existed at least since the middle of the 19th century.

They have settled wherever economic opportunities presented themselves but especially in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. Canadian Muslims have come here from nearly every continent – South and South-East Asia, the Arab world, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean.

The diversity of ethnic origin has been reflected in the Canadian Muslims' diverse expressions of Islam. Although the majority came from countries with Sunni Muslim

majorities each group observes its own doctrinal and ritual forms of faith and expresses its interpretation of Islam. Sunni Muslims represent almost three-quarters of all Canadian Muslims. Their number was estimated at 487,500 people, or 1.5% of the population of Canada in 2001, a proportion expected to grow to 3% to 4% in 2017 (900,000 to 1.3 million). Moreover, diverse national backgrounds resulted in the formation of triple identities. A distinct Canadian identity, a cultural identity, and an Islamic identity.

There are significant numbers of Shi'ite Muslims in Canada, as well, who also have diverse expressions of their faith and originate in many countries.

There are a number of factors which led Muslims from other parts of the world to choose Canada as home, although the reasons vary from one individual or family to another. Economic opportunities; political instability in their homelands; educational opportunities for their children; desire to join or reunite with family members and friends already in Canada; and the freedom of expression (religion) and association guaranteed by the Canadian constitution. In short, "they all came [to Canada] for a better life".

In 1871, records indicate that there were 13 Muslim residents in Canada and they came primarily from Syria. North America's first mosque was Al Rashid, established in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1938.

Al Rashid itself has an interesting history that I would like to share.

A Muslim lady by the name of Hilwie Hamdon, a 16-year old bride from Baka'a Valley in Lebanon arrived in Canada in 1922, with her husband, Ali Hamdon, and they settled in a fur trading post in northern Alberta. Bear in mind that this lady was born and raised in a small village, she had little formal schooling and knew no English, but her community spirit and neighbourliness went beyond these barriers.

A decade later in 1932, as she prepared to leave for Edmonton with her family, the Indian chief described her as "the finest white woman in the North". She went on to play a prominent role in establishing the roots of Muslim community in Canada. In the 1930s the Muslim community began to formally organize itself with the active participation of the women, including Hilwie Hamdon. On May 15, 1938, the City of Edmonton issued a building permit allowing construction of the first mosque in Canada. The simple and small structure looked more like a church than a mosque, but was to play a historical role in our history. Simple Muslim women, including Hilwie Hamdon, had a critical and prominent part in building it.

Hilwie Hamdon motivated the community and energized the campaign to build the mosque. She and her team convinced the Edmonton Mayor to donate a piece of land, even though he was reluctant.

The economic depression of the 1930s and the crop failure in the prairies did not stand in their way to raise money for construction.

This woman's infectious enthusiasm involved the entire community, and not just the Muslims. Donations come in from people of all faiths including simple farmers from the countryside, as far away as Saskatchewan.

Finally, by December 12, 1938, the first mosque in Canada was completed. Muslims gathered along with their friends, neighbors and colleagues to celebrate.

It was a community event, not just for Muslims alone. People of all faiths participated. The person chosen to conduct the proceedings was a Christian. Hilwie Hamdon's character who, after overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers in her personal life, was engaged in building bridges across communities.

Sadly, after so much effort, by 1982, the mosque wasn't used anymore, it was in a state of disrepair. There were plans to demolish it to make room for the expansion of an adjacent hospital. But the women in the community didn't give up; to them it was a religious space, a part of Muslim history and a piece of Canadian heritage that must be preserved.

It took four years to raise enough funds, lobby city officials to designate the mosque as a landmark, bring the broader community onside on the controversial issue of the new site, and successfully complete this mammoth undertaking.

The building was moved to the city's living history park, Fort Edmonton. On its original site, it was a marker of Muslim identity; in the new location, it was a piece of Canadian heritage.

These early pioneers made life much easier for us. They lit the torch for Muslims to understand how important civic engagement is.

Crucially perhaps, since the 1970's, we have seen Muslim women become active in politics and run in provincial elections. We have seen women graduate and go on to be successful innovators in many fields.

Until the Second World War, the growth rate of the Canadian Muslim population was very slow. It only reached a total of 3,000 in 1951. Reforms in Canada's immigration policy during the 1960s led to a regular inflow of immigrants of the Muslim faith. Further liberalization of immigration rules in the 1970s led to even an influx of Muslim immigrants. The 1981 Canadian Census listed the number of Muslims at 98,165. However, researchers believe that the number should be larger. At this time, Muslim associations estimate the number of Muslims in Ontario alone at 100,000 in 1987-88. The 1991 Census counted 253,000 individuals of the Muslim faith, more than twice the number reported in 1981. In 2001, the Census reported 579,640 Canadian Muslims; again more than double the 1991 figure.

According to estimates, Muslims in Canada numbered more than 750,000 in 2004, accounting for 2% of the national population. With the same growth rate, the number of Canadian Muslims could be estimated at almost 1 million in 2010.

Canadian Muslims are among Canada's most highly educated citizens. A recent Environics Survey of Muslims in Canada (2007) also suggests that Canadian Muslims are well educated: 45% of them have at least one university degree. They are one of the youngest groups to the Canada's national tapestry – 28.1 median age as compared with others: Jews 41 or Christians 43-46 as well as the national median age of 37.

Of the total number of persons identifying themselves as Muslims, eight in ten live in Ontario and Quebec (61% in Ontario and 19% in Quebec), while most of the remaining proportion live in British Columbia (10%) and Alberta (9%).

The diversity of Canadian Islam manifests itself through the cultural, national and linguistic traditions, and through ethnic diversity. Being of different ethnic backgrounds means Muslims in Canada have several customs and living styles, including eating habits, matrimonial customs and artistic expressions. These cultural expressions turn out to be significantly influenced by a wider world of culture and education. The first word in the Qur'an is an invitation to "Read" and learn, while a most famous Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad is "to seek knowledge even in China" (meaning the most distant land from the vintage of 7th century Arabia). The variety of Muslim expression is a living evidence of being a "world culture" where the doors are always open to diversity of expressions and to adaptability.

As mentioned, Canadian Muslims are truly diverse. Any attempt to study Canadian expression of Islam has to take into consideration the dynamics of Muslim diversity. Not only is Canadian expression of Islam highly diverse, but for many Canadian Muslims it is a novel experience to live in a pluralist liberal democracy like Canada. It would be fascinating to study the interplay of Muslim diversity and Canadian identity as Muslims establish roots in Canada and their children become fully and constructively integrated.

The resulting construct should recognize that the expression of "Muslimness" in Canada is compatible with Canadian multiculturalism and can adjust through dialogue and public policy development to become a sort of "Canadian-ness," that is, an expression of a uniquely Canadian Islam.

Citizenship in Action: Islam facilitates Muslim Faithful Citizenship in Canada

The key question for faithful Muslims is not "Are Muslims allowed to live in Canada?" Rather, the questions asked of today should be: How can Muslims in Canada or "Canadian Muslims" become the best citizens they can be while at the same time maintain their own brand of Islamic Identity? How can Canadian Muslims preserve and remain faithful to their faith and constructively integrate in Canadian pluralist society by assuming responsibilities of full citizens? What do Islamic teachings say about respecting the social contract when Muslims consciously and willingly accept Canadian citizenship?

Do Muslims have to abide by the Canadian social contract or not; and what are the religious implications if they do not?

Canadian Muslims should forget about old questions that dealt with the notion of lawfulness of our participation in a non-Muslim environment as well. I believe they should be asking some challenging new questions such as - Why should we not fully participate in our society? What are some of the internal and external challenges we all must deal with as a faith group? How could we become more effectively engaged in Canadian society? What are the best ways to achieve increased engagement and at the same time improve the image of Islam and Muslims in Canada? How could we help other Canadian citizens? How could we work together with non-Muslim faith groups (and others) against discrimination in Canada? What do we, as Muslims, have to offer to non-Muslim Canadians and our country as a whole? What are the most democratic methods of challenging discrimination and Islamophobia in Canada and making this country the safest and most peaceful place on earth?

The best and the most accurate responses to the above issues can be found in the formative sources of Islamic teaching – the Qur'an and the Sunnah (recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). That provides great comfort to Muslims asking these questions of themselves.

One very unique feature of Islam is that it establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism – between an individual and a society. It is concerned about the both equally. What is good for an individual is good for a society and what is harmful for an individual is harmful for a society.

Islam holds everyone personally accountable to God. The Qur'an confirms this reality: "Insan (a human being) shall have nothing but what he/she strives for" (The Qur'an 53: 39). On the other hand, it also awakens a sense of social responsibility in human beings, organizes them in a society and a state and enjoins the individual to subscribe to the social good. In short, Islam neither neglects the individual nor society. It establishes a harmony and a balance between the two and assigns to each its proper due.

Thus, Islam, in the lives of Canadian Muslims, acts as a facilitator or catalyst by which they can fully participate as citizens, actualizing their faith in concrete ways and realizing their potential as contributors to their well-being, that of their own community and of all other Canadians as well.

Therefore, active citizenship implies not only that citizens be engaged in taking ownership of their rights, but that they also embrace corresponding societal responsibilities that go beyond just holding a passport, or paying taxes. This level of engagement includes being part of civic decision-making processes, caring about our society's cohesion, and building its human, cultural and economic resources – building its social capital.

Consequently, most Western Muslims (Canadians included) see no difficulties whatsoever in living as law-abiding, practicing citizens in an increasingly secular country. Additionally, freedom of religion in Canada is guaranteed by our renowned Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which gives all of us the immeasurable assurance that our principles will not be undermined or hindered. Secondly, it seems that Canadian Muslims – who have come here by choice from every corner of the world -- have realized in Canada, in their collective lived experience, what it means to be an adherent of Islam as a universal religion. When they begin to really think about the values that Islam upholds, justice, truth, integrity, charity, transparency, compassion – and the list goes on, they realize that there really is no conflict between what they believe and what our Canadian society deems crucial.

Canadian Muslims enjoy complete freedom to practice the foundational principles of their faith. Mosques are built across the country. Thousands of Canadian Muslim children are attending Islamic schools which provide education to Muslim children about Qur'an and the Islamic traditions. Some of these schools are partially subsidized by the provincial governments. Thousands of Muslims perform Hajj every year and travel to Saudi Arabia with complete freedom and respect. In the month of Ramadan, all levels of Canadian government recognize the occasion and greet all Muslim citizens. Muslims pray five daily prayers in mosques without any fear or restrictions. Muslims have complete freedom to pay Zakat (poor due) to the charity or a person of their choice. Muslims have complete freedom to celebrate their festivals publicly and often employers do not have any problem to give days off to employees of Muslim faith for religious festivals.

All Muslims enjoy the freedoms of religion with their brothers and sisters of other faiths. No one stops Canadian Muslims from following the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. No one stops Canadian Muslims from talking about Islam and practicing Islam. In many cases, Muslims have more freedom to practice Islam here in Canada than Muslims in many countries with Muslim majority.

Given the foregoing arguments and precedents, there is no doubt in my mind that Muslims can reside in the West as good contributing citizens and faithful followers of Islam. As Hoftmann suggests, man-made concepts such as Darul Islam (the abode of Islam) and Darul Harb (the abode of war), that have virtually lost their relevance in our present time.

Conservative theologians' debates promoting the necessity of Islamic life only in Islamic states have thus ceased to be relevant and pertinent, for they do not take into consideration that at least one-third of the world's Muslims live in non-Muslim lands, under non-Islamic laws. For these and similar reasons, contemporary Muslim scholars should be seriously discussing proactive models of Muslim life in Western societies and helping the Diaspora communities everywhere to adjust and thrive as citizens of their host countries – not making Islam difficult and confusing for them.

Conclusion

This discussion focuses on understanding the way Muslims are settling, integrating and being included into Canadian society; at a time when Muslim leaders/scholars need to reread some of the texts as they apply to the Canadian context and when policy makers in Canada need to interpret policies on Multiculturalism, immigration and citizenship in the spirit of current conditions of the country.

This discussion can contribute to the debate on how Muslims can further engage in, participate in and contribute successfully to Canada and how Canadian policy makers can help in this process of inclusion of almost three percent of Canadians successfully. It should be noted that there is nothing in Islam that commands Muslims to withdraw from their society, or even to become visibly ghettoized, in order to be closer to God.

On the contrary, in order to be in full harmony with their identity, Muslims need to exercise even more vigorously the choice and freedom to practice Islamic teachings in a Canadian context. At the same time, they must consciously develop the Canadian image and pattern of their identity for both the present and future. This is not only their social but an Islamic religious responsibility as well. Therefore, it is critical that the Canadian Muslim leadership and Canada's policy makers realize that more engagement of Muslims in Canada should be made a priority.

The quality of life for Muslims in Canada is far better than of those in other democratic societies in many respects, but areas for improvement still exist. Steps could be taken to assist in speeding up the understanding of Muslim intellectual heritage, their engagement as Canada's citizens and consequently their faster constructive integration.

Muslim leadership, scholars and institutions in Canada as well as Canadian government, should find ways to assist Canadian citizens of the Muslim faith in their full participation in Canada and to consequently achieve full integration/inclusion.

It is therefore, the moral responsibility of all Canadian institutions to assist its citizens in becoming better contributors to the society, regardless of which faith they are or where they are from. To do so guarantees that each citizen is contributing to Canada and strengthening it. The seventeenth-century philosopher Spinoza articulated the following statement: "Citizens are made, not born." It is my hope that in acknowledging the heritage of Muslims in Canada, Canadian Muslims will be reminded of their own contributions and build on them. Other Canadians will also look at the achievements of Canadian Muslims and renew their commitment to helping immigrants adjust to a new life in a better land.

Thank YOU!!!