

Title: "January 29: A Call to Action to the Philanthropic Sector on Islamophobia"

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Published in: *The Philanthropist*, Journal

ISSN 2562-1491

Date: January 28, 2019

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2019/01/january-29-a-call-to-action-to-the-philanthropic-sector/>

Date of PDF Download: February 17, 2019

January 29: A Call to Action to the Philanthropic Sector on Islamophobia

By Shazlin Rahman and Rudayna Bahubeshi

Six men killed, six women widowed, 17 children left fatherless, and one survivor paralyzed. Two years on, many Muslims are still reeling from the shock of the attack on the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City.

As communities across the country gather on January 29 to remember the lives of Ibrahima Barry, Mamadou Tanou Barry, Khaled Belkacemi, Aboubaker Thabti, Abdelkrim Hassane, and Azzedine Soufiane, there is a hard truth we need to acknowledge: the attack on the Islamic centre is part of a rapidly growing trend of violence and hate targeting Muslims across the country. The Quebec Islamic centre has repeatedly been targeted-: a defaced Quran was delivered to the mosque, the mosque president's car was firebombed, a severed pig's head was left at one of the doors, and the mosque has received a steady stream of hate mail. Now, worshippers need an electronic key to enter.[1]

According to Statistics Canada, hate crimes against Muslims nearly tripled in Quebec from 41 in 2016 to 117 in 2017, peaking in February 2017 — the month following the mass shooting.[2] Nationally, hate crimes against Muslims decreased between 2015 to 2016, but rose drastically by 151% in 2017.[3] Statistics Canada's report also reminds us that this data doesn't show the true scope of hate crimes in Canada, as not all victims report these crimes to the police.

As an organization with roots in Vision TV, Canada's first multifaith television network, Inspirit Foundation began by funding projects that promote interfaith understanding and pluralism. Through those early funding programs and internal research, we identified Islamophobia as a significant barrier to inclusion in Canada. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, we increased our focus on Islamophobia and funded research to understand the experiences of young Muslims in Canada. Addressing Islamophobia became one of two priority areas in our 2016–2021 strategic plan, alongside advancing reconciliation.

While Inspirit Foundation is one of the only non-Muslim foundations in Canada focused on addressing Islamophobia, many organizations are tackling issues connected to racism and Islamophobia. There is a growing sense of urgency among foundations to address Islamophobia. Lacking across the sector, however, is the experience, including lived experience, necessary to inform anti-Islamophobia and anti-

racist strategies that could help create systemic change.

Data from the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) shows that nearly 87% of executive directors and senior staff in the Ontario non-profit sector are white.[4] Although similar data focused on foundations has not been captured, we know many are part of ONN's network and that the two sectors are closely linked.

Organizations working to address barriers to inclusion without adequate representation from the communities they are seeking to serve may face a critical knowledge gap. While building partnerships with such communities is important, leadership may still miss the nuances in how social issues intersect and nest within each other. In the case of Islamophobia, we know that other issues experienced by Muslims, including anti-Black racism, unemployment, and mental illness, often exacerbate it.

We've heard from peers in the sector that they don't know where to begin in addressing Islamophobia. In the first three years of funding projects focused on anti-Islamophobia, we have been able to tap into a growing population of Muslims who are dedicated volunteers, educators, activists, and professionals who expect more out of the country they call home. Below are some of the lessons we've learned from projects we've funded, and from our ongoing engagement with Muslim communities across the country. While we remember the six lives lost on January 29, 2017, let's also reflect on the work ahead of us.

1. Start from the top

Consider how addressing Islamophobia can relate to your organization's strategic direction. Islamophobia affects mental and physical health, education and employment opportunities, civic participation, housing equity, and more. For example, if your foundation works to improve access to employment, consider how Islamophobia can affect hiring practices and work opportunities for Muslims. There are myriad ways Muslims can be discriminated against in places of work, from the over-policing of women's dress to lack of prayer spaces, or xenophobic attitudes.

2. Understand the landscape

Many Muslim-led organizations are effectively supporting Muslim communities. They're fostering skills and working with one another in solidarity to address a wide range of social issues. Consider how their work may fit within your organizational mandate or how you can amplify or support their efforts. Here are some of the organizations we've worked with.

3. Find ways to grant and partner

Look for pathways to grant to Muslim organizations. Most foundations can only grant to charitable organizations, and this presents a systemic barrier to funding for many organizations addressing Islamophobia. Given that political advocacy is an important strategy for charities to address Islamophobia, many Muslim organizations face difficulties acquiring charitable status and in accessing funds to sustain their work. You can help by assisting these organizations in finding a like-minded charity to accept funds and partner on initiatives.

4. Gather evidence

Always check your assumptions and invest in collecting data and research to understand what Islamophobia looks like on the ground. Work directly with Muslim communities to learn from their lived experiences and formulate an approach based on their insights. At Inspirit Foundation, we reach out to various networks of Muslim communities to better understand the nature of Islamophobia in different cities across the country. When we conducted the Young Muslims in Canada Study with the Environics Institute, it was critical that we partnered with Muslim organizations.

5. Take an asset-based approach

Muslims are more than their experiences with Islamophobia. Champion the ongoing work, strengths, and capacities that already exist within Muslim communities. Inspirit's impact investing strategy, for example, is often regarded as one of the first of its kind in a field that is still nascent in Canada. It was fascinating for us to learn that some of the principles of Islamic finance can be found in best-in-class approaches to impact investing. For foundations, impact investing is fresh and innovative, but similar practices have been in practice for millennia in Muslim communities. By investing in Muslim-led funds, scholarships, and businesses, foundations can find opportunities to contribute to sustainable, thriving Muslim communities.

[1] Pertiz, Ingrid. "Lingering wounds and fears for the future." *The Globe and Mail*, 26 January 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/one-year-after-the-quebec-mosque-shooting-lingering-wounds-and-fears-for-the-future/article37741295/>. Accessed Jan 9 2018.

[2] Statistics Canada. "Police-reported hate crime, 2017," November 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien>. Accessed Jan 9 2019.

[3] Statistics Canada. "Police-reported hate crime, 2017."

[4] Ontario Nonprofit Network. "Shaping the Future: Leadership in Ontario's Nonprofit Labour Force," September 2013, <https://theonnc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ONN-Mowat.Shaping-the-Future.-Leadership.Exec-Summary.pdf>. Accessed 7 January 2019.