

FEELING THE CHILL

Discrimination against Muslims and Arabs in Canada



Public labelling

Detained under a security certificate

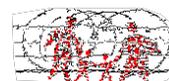


Interviewed by CSIS & RCMP

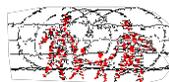
Under surveillance



CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES



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DISCRIMINATION IN TODAY'S SECURITY CONTEXT

Today's heightened security context has led to discrimination against Canadian Muslims and Arabs, including those perceived as such. Many speak of feeling demonized. Media coverage has irresponsibly associated entire groups of Muslims and Arabs with terrorism, linking them by virtue of religious or ethnic association with the crimes of others.

People who care about justice and who seek an open and welcoming society must defend the right of Muslims and Arabs to live free of discrimination in Canada.

IMPACTS REPORTED BY CANADIAN ARABS AND MUSLIMS

Canadian Muslims and Arabs are feeling the effects of discrimination in their daily lives. For example, they report:

- Secret trials and prolonged detention
- Detention, interrogation and humiliation of travellers entering or transiting the United States
- Vandalism against mosques
- Being labelled as supporting terrorism
- Discrimination in employment and housing
- Harassment and name calling
- Distorted representation in media

NEGATIVE MEDIA PORTRAYALS

Some Canadian media contribute to dangerous stereotyping. They serve a diet of distorted images which promote the false notion that Islam as a religion condones violence, and associate Muslims and Arabs with terrorism. When the media prominently identify individuals who are suspected of wrongdoing as being Muslim or Arab, they unfairly imply that all Arabs and Muslims are collectively responsible for the actions of certain individuals.

MUSLIMS AND ARABS AND THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

The Canadian government itself has discriminated against Arabs and Muslims in Canada.

- In the summer of 2003, Citizenship and Immigration Canada **publicly labelled** 23 Muslim men of Pakistani and Indian nationality as "suspected terrorists". It soon became apparent that these arrests under "Operation Thread" had been based on flimsy evidence and the accusations of terrorism were dropped. However, the lives of those arrested were drastically altered by being publicly associated with terrorism.
- Muslims and Arabs have been the principal victims of the government's use of the **security certificate**, used to detain non-citizens for prolonged periods and deport them. The detained individual and their lawyer cannot see the evidence against them.

As of September 2004, six people were detained on security certificates; all but one are Arab. This lack of due process is a violation of international human rights law.

- Muslims and Arabs have been subjected to **intrusive interviewing** by the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) and the RCMP in public contexts such as their workplaces. Although interviews may be necessary to gather information, the methods used have intimidated interviewees and unfairly exposed them to suspicion of being involved in terrorism.

FEAR AMONG CANADIAN MUSLIMS AND ARABS

The deportation of Canadian Maher Arar from the United States in 2002, and his subsequent torture in Syria, shocked Canadians, particularly Muslims and Arabs. They ask themselves "Could the Canadian government be passing on suspicions about me to foreign governments?" or "Might I be suspected if I'm seen with other Arabs or Muslims who may be under suspicion?"

How safe can anyone in Canada feel with the ever present risk of being fingered as a terrorist suspect?

Canadian Muslims report fears of police surveillance and having their phones tapped. They worry their neighbours regard them with suspicion merely due to their religion. In such a climate, many Muslims and Arabs are afraid to report discriminatory behaviour or incidents, for fear of making things worse.

CANADIAN MUSLIMS AND ARABS HAVE A RIGHT TO BE HERE

According to Statistics Canada, there are approximately 580,000 Muslims in Canada, and 72,000 Arabs. Some are from families who have been in Canada for over a century; they understandably tire when asked: "Where are you from?" as if they are somehow less Canadian than a "Smith" or a "Tremblay".

Canadian Muslims and Arabs are like other Canadians – they seek security for their families, for their communities and for their country.

THINGS TO CELEBRATE

The problem of discrimination is real. However, we can challenge it:

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees **protection from discrimination**: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability." (Section 15(1))
- Arabs and Muslims, individually and through local and national groups, are speaking out about their experiences of discrimination, and organizing to protect their rights.

- Many Canadians are committed to working for a Canada that is free of discrimination and where every human being is valued and respected.
- Canadians who are neither Arab nor Muslim recognize that discrimination is a problem not just for minorities, but for all Canadians, and are speaking and acting against injustices towards Arabs and Muslims.
- The Government of Canada agreed to a public inquiry into the case of Maher Arar, recognizing that Arab and Muslim Canadians have equal right to protection as other citizens. The inquiry, which followed months of advocacy by Mr. Arar and his family as well as by countless other Canadians, shows that citizens can make a difference when they insist on justice.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- If you are a Muslim or Arab, stand up for your rights and partner with other Canadians to support you.
- If you are not a Muslim or Arab, inform yourself about Islam and Arab history and culture, and about the experiences of your Muslim and Arab neighbours and colleagues.
- Speak out when you come across stereotyping of Muslims or Arabs in the media, at school, in the workplace or anywhere else.
- Intervene when you suspect a Muslim or Arab is being unfairly treated.

- Create opportunities for dialogue, formal or informal, allowing Muslims and Arabs to discuss their experiences and perspectives with other Canadians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION (Organizations and their websites)

- **Canadian Arab Federation** - www.caf.ca
Report hate and racism to the toll-free Anti-Hate Line at 1-866-886-4675
- **Canadian Council of Muslim Women**—www.ccmw.com
- **Canadian Islamic Congress** - www.canadianislamiccongress.com
- **Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Canada** - www.caircan.ca
Report hate crimes toll-free to 1-866-524-0004
- **The National Council on Canada-Arab Relations** - www.nccar.ca
- **Maher Arar Inquiry website** www.ararcommission.ca
- **Maher Arar's website** - www.maherarar.ca