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## **RACISM IN CANADA**

**Inquiry—Debate Continued**

**Speech by:**

**The Honourable Claudette Tardif**

**Tuesday, February 8, 2011**

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, February 8, 2011

### RACISM IN CANADA

#### INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Oliver calling the attention of the Senate to the state of Pluralism, Diversity and Racism in Canada and, in particular, to how we can develop new tools to meet the challenges of the 21st century to fight hatred and racism; to reduce the number of hate crimes; and to increase Canadians' tolerance in matters of race and religion.

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, this inquiry was adjourned in Senator Andreychuk's name. I suggest that it again be adjourned in her name once I have finished my speech.

Honourable senators, I rise today to continue the excellent inquiry by Senator Donald Oliver, who called the attention of the Senate, on October 19, 2010, to diversity, pluralism and racism in Canada. I am enthusiastic about participating in this debate. We must have an open dialogue on these issues so that we can develop ways to fight hatred and racism, reduce the number of hate crimes and increase tolerance and respect in Canada.

[English]

I thank my honourable colleague for bringing awareness to this topic of great concern. As Canadians, we need to address the issue surrounding racial, cultural and ethnic diversity comprising our country. We need to instil positive values in our youth — those of understanding, accepting and appreciating those differences that form the fabric of Canadian life.

[Translation]

I would like to begin by sharing a few statistics about Canada's demographic reality. Each year, Canada welcomes approximately 250,000 new permanent residents from around the world. The 2006 census revealed that people from more than 200 ethnic origins make Canada their home, with visible minorities accounting for 16.2 percent of the total population, which is up from 11.2 percent in 1996.

A report published by Statistics Canada predicts that by 2031, about one-third of Canada's population will be from a visible minority and about one in four Canadians will be foreign-born. Simply put, the size of the visible minority population will double in Canada in the decades to come. These changing demographics demonstrate a significant, recent growth in the country's ethnic and religious diversity. It goes without saying that Canada's population is varied, diverse and constantly changing.

[English]

As the demographic realities of Canada are changing, so are those of my native province of Alberta. It is estimated that by 2031, visible minorities will account for 38 per cent of Calgary's population, more than the anticipated national average, and for 29 per cent of Edmonton's population.

Immigrant and cultural diversity play a key role in the vitality of the province of Alberta. This diversity also contributes significantly to the growing strength and diversity of the province's francophone communities.

[Translation]

Indeed, only 3 out of 10 Franco-Albertans were born in Alberta and nearly 15 percent of the French-speaking population in Alberta came there as immigrants. Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba welcome many immigrants of African origin, representing 25.3 percent, 26.9 percent and 27.8 percent of all French-speaking newcomers in those three provinces. In addition, nearly 2,700 Franco-Albertans belong to one of the First Nations.

Let me remind honourable senators that Canada has had a Multiculturalism Act in place since 1988. The goal of this legislation, which includes the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada and provides a legal policy framework to guide federal responsibilities and activities with regard to the advancement of multiculturalism in Canada, is to preserve and enhance multiculturalism in Canada, to assist in the preservation of culture and language, to reduce discrimination, to enhance cultural awareness and understanding, and to promote culturally sensitive institutional change.

Most Canadian provinces also have multiculturalism policies that invite all Canadians to accept cultural diversity and encourage everyone to be full members of Canadian society. Quebec prefers a policy of interculturalism between groups of different cultures. Interculturalism is the preferred means of raising awareness of cultural diversity. It is based on the assumption that the host society will actively participate in the integration of new arrivals and that there is mutual knowledge and understanding of cultural differences. More specifically, interculturalism suggests that the dominant culture of the host country or region will be adopted, and that commonalities will be identified while preserving individual differences. The Quebec policy of interculturalism is based on three key elements: French as the common public language, the participation and contribution of all in a democratic setting; and a pluralistic and open society to the extent made possible by democratic values and intercommunity exchanges.

[English]

Some scholars of late maintain that multiculturalism should be struck from our national vocabulary. They maintain that Canada needs to refocus the debate by replacing the term "multiculturalism" with the concept of pluralism, a concept that articulates a sense of citizenship through the idea of responsibility.

This change, according to Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Historica-Dominion Institute, will encourage people to define themselves as individuals and have their rights recognized, all while reinforcing the need to take their civic roles more seriously.

The goal here is to build a successful society around the concept of citizenship so that newcomers become familiar with the symbols and institutions rooted in Canadian history and the fundamental Canadian values of freedom and democracy, as well as the contributions made by groups of people more recently arrived.

[*Translation*]

No matter what definition is used, the fact remains that the principle of racial and cultural equality has the force of law in Canada, which means that all organizations, departments and Crown corporations have a responsibility to enforce this law by promoting cultural diversity in all Canadian sectors. In addition, there are a number of other legal texts that help fight racism in Canada, including the Human Rights Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Employment Equity Act and a number of provincial policies, just to name a few.

Diversity is also one of our Canadian values. In a survey published in 2003 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), 54 per cent of those surveyed stated that multiculturalism made them very proud to be Canadian.

[*English*]

However, despite having formal federal laws in place to promote tolerance and diversity in Canada, as well as having an increasing diversity in our country, incidents of racism and intolerance continue to occur in Canada.

A recent 2011 survey conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation found that 46 per cent of respondents agree that racism is on the rise in Canada; 45 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement. The survey also found that 38 per cent of the respondents had witnessed an act of racism within the last year.

This survey demonstrates that Canadians have contrasting views when it comes to experiences with racism in Canada, and that many are not aware of its significance or occurrence. It takes little more than to open a newspaper or turn on a television to notice that discrimination happens on many levels.

• (1600)

I was disheartened to read an internal report this summer about the alarming and systemic rates of racial profiling within the Montreal Police Service. The report, done by criminologists who had been with the Montreal Police Service since 2006, stated that Black youth in the northern part of Montreal were stopped by police approximately 40 per cent of the time, as compared to 5 or 6 per cent for White youth. The report also showed that random stops of Black citizens more than doubled between 2001 and 2007, and that Black citizens were more likely than their White counterparts to be stopped for vague and unjustified reasons.

[*Translation*]

Another indicator of the racial discrimination that persists in Canada is the level of integration of visible minorities, measured through labour market participation, education, income, housing, political and civic involvement and health. According to a report by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, visible minorities and Aboriginals are seriously disadvantaged in Canada's labour market, with large gaps between labour market prospects for visible minority and non-visible minority

populations. The employment rate is lower and unemployment rate is higher for visible minorities than for non-visible minorities. The demands for labour market flexibility have disproportionately exposed "racialized" groups to contract, temporary, part-time, and shift work with poor job security and low wages and benefits. The rate of university degree attainment among Aboriginals is significantly lower than that of non-Aboriginals. The average employment income of Canadian visible minorities is approximately 86 per cent of the general population's. Newcomers to Canada and visible minorities are significantly over-represented in high poverty neighbourhoods.

[*English*]

A recent finding by the Conference Board of Canada also suggests that Canada's failure to properly use the skills of immigrants costs this country \$5 billion a year in lost productivity. This is but one example of how discrimination negatively affects the country's economy.

[*Translation*]

These alarming data reveal the deeply rooted discrimination in our institutions, our systems and our culture. Senator Oliver listed a number of indicators of discrimination and racism in Canada, and in his wise words, "equality is still not a reality."

[*English*]

Yet there is hope, honourable senators. I truly believe that education is the key to cultivating tolerance and understanding, embracing cultural diversity and bringing awareness to prejudice and discrimination. According to UNESCO, building tolerance requires access to education. Intolerance is often rooted in ignorance and fear: fear of the unknown of "the other" — other cultures, other religions and other nations.

I would like to speak about the pedagogical efforts and initiatives of several organizations in my home province of Alberta, namely those of the Tolerance Caravan of Alberta and of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

[*Translation*]

In 1995, the first Tolerance Caravan visited five schools in Montreal and the Laurentians after the Comité Rapprochement Québec launched an awareness program in high schools about prejudice, discrimination and genocide. The Tolerance Foundation, a non-profit organization, was founded to direct the Caravan, which was a great success with youth. That organization was founded by one of our former colleagues, Senator Goldstein.

Since then, the Tolerance Foundation has been actively working to encourage high school youth to be open to difference by developing teaching tools and offering activities, workshops and initiatives to fight against racism and discrimination.

[*English*]

The Tolerance Caravan of Alberta, inspired by the Montreal-based caravan that travels throughout Quebec, has been organizing activities in numerous francophone and French-immersion schools in my home province since 2006. The Tolerance Caravan of Alberta is one of Alliance jeunesse-famille de l'Alberta Society's signature initiatives, an Alberta-based not-for-profit organization

whose mission is to prevent crime among French-speaking immigrant youth and families and to facilitate their integration into Alberta's social and professional life. It plays a key role in teaching Albertan youth about the effects of racism, discrimination and prejudice by promoting intercultural exchanges and interactive discussions.

[Translation]

May I have an additional five minutes, please?

**Hon. Gerald J. Comeau (Deputy Leader of the Government):** Yes.

**Senator Tardif:** Alberta's Caravan of Tolerance primarily aims to reinforce and encourage partnerships between schools, youth, the police, media and the community. The Caravan's workshops are targeted at 9 to 17 year-olds and are based on exchange, dialogue and meetings.

Similarly, the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights is a non-profit organization in Edmonton that envisions a world that manifests a culture of peace and human rights in which the dignity of every person is respected, valued and celebrated. Its mission is to advance a culture of peace and human rights through educational programs and activities, community collaboration and relationship building guided by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[English]

The Edmonton-based centre is named after John Peters Humphrey, a Canadian and principal drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration was born from the ashes of World War II and the Holocaust. It was a global rejection of the notion that what is right is determined by who is in power and it was drafted by men and women of various nations, ideologies and religions.

The declaration was ratified on December 10, 1948. In 1995, in the fiftieth year of the United Nations, Pope John Paul II would hail it as one of the highest expressions of the human conscience in our time.

The beauty of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is in its commonality: It speaks to all people, regardless of race, religion, geography, gender or social class. It has survived for 58 years as the moral blueprint of the world precisely because it has the uncanny ability to resonate with each of us, despite our differences and diversity, in a manner that seems directly tailored to our individual beliefs and aspirations.

The declaration has had a tremendous influence upon the lives of millions around the globe. No greater example exists than in Canada, which followed the United Nations' path in enshrining and guaranteeing fundamental human rights through the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As Madam Chief Justice McLachlin has noted, the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 elevated basic human rights, Aboriginal rights and equality to the status of supreme law against which all government actions, regulations and legislation must be assessed. The Charter stands as Canada's ultimate expression of our commitment to freedom and human dignity.

[Translation]

As I conclude my speech, I am very hopeful. I believe that tolerance, understanding, respect and openness to Canadian diversity are part of a project that is already under way.

[English]

Transforming one's fears into understanding, acceptance, openness and embracement are the goals and initiatives of many organizations across this great country. To quote Nelson Mandela, as I have tried to convey throughout my contribution to Senator Oliver's inquiry, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

• (1610)

A recent article in the journal, *The Ismaili*, speaks to the space and freedom that is given in Canada to the negotiation of the plurality of identities:

This uniquely Canadian idea of citizenship tells us that it does not matter where we come from or what the colour of our skin is and that what makes us up, individually and collectively, are our spiritual, moral, ethical, educational and cultural experiences and insight.

A society which emphasizes uniformity, as former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau once said, is one which creates intolerance and hate.

Honourable senators, we need to be vigilant and continue our efforts to ensure that in our policies and programs diversity is recognized as a basic cultural value in Canadian society.

(On motion of Senator Andreychuk, debate adjourned.)