

Statement against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism in Canada

Approved by the BCASW Board of Directors September 19, 2025

The British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) acknowledges that Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism (AMR) are real, well embedded within Canadian society, and on the rise. “Islamophobia includes racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed toward individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level” (Government of Canada, 2019).

Like Islamophobia, Anti-Muslim Racism refers to fear, hatred and violence against Muslims but it places more emphasis on practices of racism, discrimination, and violence directed toward these communities at institutional and individual levels. Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism are interconnected and mutually reinforcing because the former produces and encompasses the negative ideologies and stereotypes that perpetuate racialized discrimination against Muslim communities (Elkasssem, 2025).

In Canada, AMR continues to take the form of hate crimes as well as discriminatory policies and practices in workplaces and institutions such as governments and media that negatively impact Muslims. The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights was disturbed to hear that incidents of Islamophobia are a daily reality for many Muslims and that one in four Canadians do not trust Muslims (Halal, 2022),

The Senate Committee also learned that Canada leads the G7 in terms of targeted killings of Muslims motivated by Islamophobia (Woolf, 2024). Targeted killings of Muslims include: the 2021 domestic terrorism vehicle attack in London, Ontario that resulted in the murder of four members of a family; the 2020 stabbing murder of Mohamed-Aslim Zalifs in the parking lot of an International Muslim Organization in Etobicoke, Ontario while he was screening congregants for COVID-19; and the 2017 mass shooting in Quebec at the Islamic Cultural Centre that led to the murder of six people.

Targeted hate and violence against Muslim communities continues to grow in Canada. The National Council of Canadian Muslims report a 1300% increase in reported hate incidents since October 7, 2023 (Diab, 2024). In many incidences, Muslim women are targeted for verbal aggressive comments, hate, and violence based on the visibility of their religious head coverings. On March 22, 2025, in Ajax Ontario, a Muslim woman wearing a hijab was attacked in a library and the female perpetrator attempted to light the victim’s hijab on fire (Alevato, 2025).

In the Canadian job market, some studies have indicated that unemployment rates are significantly higher amongst Muslim Canadians than other groups with similar skills based on discrimination (Hamdani, 2015). Additional forms of AMR in the workplace, “involve denial of prayers spaces or questioning of time off for religious holidays (Shah, n.d.).

AMR is also evident in Canadian immigrations policies. For instance, there has been a disproportionate level of support for Ukrainian asylum seekers (Government of Canada, 2024)

compared to Palestinian refugees fleeing the war in Gaza (Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, 2024), or other Muslim majority countries (Amnesty International Canada, 2024). Reports of AMR also continue to increase across social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok, in the form of hateful communications and racist stereotypes portraying Muslims as violent terrorists (Rose & Davey, 2023).

The BCASW strongly condemns these acts of Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism. The BCASW believes social workers must adopt an Anti-racism approach to effectively challenge AMR and all forms of racism. Adopting this approach entails addressing AMR at all levels of social work including direct practice, community organizing, advocacy and policy, and education and research (Elkassem, 2025).

Through direct practice, social workers can provide support to Muslim individuals and groups impacted by AMR and work to challenge the systems that perpetuate this form of prejudice and discrimination. Community organizing can involve social workers collaborating with Muslim communities to create community-based agencies that support Muslims and advocate with them to combat AMR. Engaging in public campaigns that challenge hate crimes and advocating for policies that challenge institutional AMR such as discriminatory immigration policies is another concrete step social workers can take. Lastly, promoting social work education that helps students understand and address AMR is an additional action for social workers and Canadian Schools of Social Work.

The BCASW stands with the Muslim communities and will support social workers in British Columbia and throughout Canada to adopt an Anti-racism approach.

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