



Musée Holocauste Montréal
Montreal Holocaust Museum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bill 62: The Montreal Holocaust Museum is Deeply Concerned

Montreal, Thursday, September 14, 2017 – The Montreal Holocaust Museum wishes to voice its deep concern regarding *Bill 62: An Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for religious accommodation requests in certain bodies*. We believe that the Bill, currently being debated at the Québec National Assembly, will have a negative impact on the cohesion and relations between Quebecers of various faiths and origins.

As the only Holocaust museum in Canada, we welcome more than 16,400 visitors each year. Our mandate focuses on raising awareness of the consequences of antisemitism, hatred and racism. Our educational programs reach tens of thousands of people each year. The Museum encourages members of the public to examine their own prejudices, and understand their effects. We strongly believe that the fight against discrimination requires respect for differences, the promotion of human rights and openness to diversity. It is from this perspective that the Montreal Holocaust Museum intervenes in today's debate surrounding the religious neutrality of the State.

Above all else, religious neutrality of the State promises the protection, respect and equal treatment of each individual's religious practices. This means ensuring that the State does not favour or disadvantage any religious belief or practice. If a public administration is expected not to discriminate on the basis of religion, it is reasonable to assume that it is its duty to serve the recipients of its services equitably and fairly. In applying religious neutrality to the State, it is equally reasonable to expect that the recruitment of its staff cannot be discriminatory. Therefore, an impartial official does not challenge State neutrality through her appearance, or wearing religious symbols. Unfortunately, the Bill and its amendments imply that certain individuals and particularly, a small group of women call State neutrality into question because of their appearance.

Following the 2007 reasonable accommodations crisis and the 2013 debate surrounding the Charter of Québec values, we find ourselves once again blaming religious minorities, their visibility and their presence in public space. The recurring nature of these debates affects all minority groups. It encourages intolerance towards certain practices, and disparages difference by creating a false perception of threat. We reiterate the message we voiced in 2013: without respect for cultural differences and religious practices, we cannot respect human dignity. In our view, social cohesion does not depend on cultural or religious uniformity, but on respect for all members of society.

We believe that strong leadership is needed to encourage understanding, and build bridges among all Quebecers. This is particularly important in the current context of mistrust and at times, hatred of minorities as expressed by certain small groups.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum was founded in 1979 by Holocaust survivors and members of the Montreal Jewish community. Its mission is to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the Holocaust, while sensitising the public to the universal perils of antisemitism, racism, hate and indifference. Through its Museum, its commemorative programs and educational initiatives, the Montreal Holocaust Museum promotes respect for diversity and the sanctity of human life.

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