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Centre commémoratif  
de l'Holocauste à Montréal

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Montreal Holocaust  
Memorial Centre

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Montreal, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Monsieur Bernard Drainville  
Ministre responsable des Institutions démocratiques et de la Participation citoyenne  
875, Grande Allée Est, 5<sup>e</sup> étage, Bureau 5.725  
Québec (Québec) G1R 4Y8

**Reference:** Reaction of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre regarding Bill 60

Minister Drainville,

We would like to make you aware of the serious concerns of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre regarding the Charter, or Bill 60. We are firmly opposed as we understand it to increase prejudice and stereotypes regarding religious practice, and limit fundamental rights and liberties.

Following the Holocaust, 9,000 survivor refugees made Montreal their new home. They appreciated this place of great freedom, which allowed them and their families to flourish. They speak of their adopted home with great pride in many video testimonies recorded by the Centre. They became integrated in Quebec society, a society whose history speaks to respect for religious freedom, despite the fact that some might wear religious symbols, now deemed ostentatious. They, their children and grandchildren, and now great grandchildren, are Quebecers. The current Bill generates, on the other hand, fear and questioning. Is this our place? Will stigma and the unwillingness to respect signs of religious belief cause new prejudice against minorities? Will it act to counter the integration which has already taken place?

Their knowledge of discrimination, prejudice and persecution is significant. Prejudice and stereotypes based on religion will be accentuated through this Charter. It has already had a distressing impact on some Muslim women. Sensitisation about the impact of antisemitism, hate and racism is the very core of our mandate as a Centre. Our Museum and educational programs and tools help the young and less young understand the consequences of discrimination. The Bill prohibits the wearing of religious signs for civil servants and potentially, any person with which the Government has a contract or to which it confers a grant, and goes as far as to ban certain food practices, likely those of Jews and Muslims, in family daycares. The Charter legitimises discrimination and will entrench ignorance of minority religious practice and communities through lack of exposure, and negate their contribution to Quebec society. It will push difference out of the socially acceptable public sphere.



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After the tragic events of World War II, the international community was compelled to adopt treaties to protect individual human rights, amongst others, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Agreement on Civil and Political Rights (1966). The Quebec Charter of Human Rights, unanimously adopted by the National Assembly in 1975, is inspired by these international agreements. Given its quasi constitutional nature, it is clear that Quebec society values rights and freedoms as primordial, notably the freedom of conscience, of religion and the interdiction of discrimination on these bases.

As presented, the Charter violates these fundamental rights. Our understanding of prejudice speaks to the incremental nature of discrimination and the development of stigmatization of groups. This Charter is one such step. Our educational work focuses on the history of the Holocaust as a human issue, one that although affecting one particular group, Jews, has universal messages and important repercussions for all mankind. It is one of the reasons that the Centre works in partnership with several other communities who have suffered from discrimination. These stories teach the importance of protecting human rights, as soon as they are questioned, to prevent the potential of tyranny of the majority. The rights and freedoms enshrined in these Charters are a precious legacy of international law after the War to protect the rights of all minorities.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Charter will and does divide Quebecers rather than unite them. The Government has a responsibility to promote respect for diversity and to assure that freedoms and fundamental rights are maintained. For these reasons, we ask that Bill 60 be withdrawn. We intend to present a brief on this subject to the parliamentary commission.

Sincerely,

Helen Malkin  
President

Alice Herscovitch  
Executive Director