



FOUNDATION  
AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE  
& RACISM

The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) is dedicated to advancing civil rights and fundamental freedoms for all Canadians, and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding, and humanity. Recognizing Canada as a beautiful mosaic of diverse cultures and people, FAIR supports pro-human beliefs that appreciate the unique identities and common humanity of every single person, regardless of their viewpoints or immutable traits such as skin colour, ancestry, ethnicity or religion.

Recently, a recording surfaced on social media where an Edmonton school teacher is heard criticising Muslim students for not attending school Pride events. While we do not know what was said beforehand, we do think that the tone and content of the comments were concerning. It should also be said that publishing a recording without the prior consent of the subject is also troublesome.

FAIR Alberta takes issue with the insinuation that certain religious groups are not welcome in the diverse social mosaic that is Canada. A generous interpretation of the intended message is that students were being encouraged to be tolerant of views different from their own. FAIR advocates for pro-human values like tolerance, however the tone heard on the recording makes it difficult to credit the speaker with that generosity. This forms a zero sum situation where the beliefs held by an individual or group cannot coexist with another competing set of values.

It should go without saying that these Muslim students, as well as their LGBTQ classmates, are all welcome in Canada where we have a Constitutional right to both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. Overt celebrations of faith-based holy days are changing to reflect the diverse population Canada is home to. Efforts are made, as the teacher points out, to encourage Muslim students in their religious contemplation during Ramadan. But this does not require participation of a school population in a prolonged fasting period. Acknowledgement without participation is a valid option.

An opportunity was missed to evaluate how the school's Pride events might be received by students adhering to not only the Islamic religion but other faith groups and even students with no religious beliefs. FAIR believes in the universality of civil rights. LGBTQ people have civil rights as do people of any faith background and truthfully, all of us. One person's rights as a member of a protected class can not and do not cancel out the rights of those who are members of a different protected class. Finding places where values are shared, emphasizing our common humanity, is an ideal to strive for while leaving room for respectful disagreement.

During an impressionable time in a child's life, modeling inquiry, tolerance and compassion are paramount. It is difficult to consolidate personal beliefs with the sway of the cultural effects of community. Discussion is the bridge we use to navigate our differences and reach common ground where **all** students regardless of their faith, sexual orientation or any combination of individual characteristics at all can come together and share their viewpoints under the umbrella that is Canada.

FAIR recognizes that anyone can hold a personal belief in error, and it takes compassion and grace to allow people to evolve their position. We appreciate the statement from Londonderry Principal Ed Charpentier saying that this teacher's words are not a reflection of the values of Londonderry School. **We hope that all educators across Alberta (and indeed the country) will promote the pro-human values of curiosity and humility while uplifting our common humanity.** We should be able to live together acknowledging shared values without total conformity. This is the essence of a civil society.