

Canadian Arab Federation Address to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on October 5th 2009

I would like to make my presentation in both of Canada's official languages: French and English.

English: I would like to thank the OSCE and its department, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), for the invitation and for giving us the opportunity to state our point of view. Canada, Mr. Moderator, represents an exemplary country that symbolizes the best principals of liberty, human rights, democracy and justice. Indeed we have some progressive and intelligent immigration laws. We also have multiculturalism and a dynamic Charter of Rights and Freedoms but there is also another reality to Canada. This reality is one of racism and discrimination. There is an alarming trend and reality of poverty which is now affecting racialized minorities and Aboriginal peoples in an inhumane way. From the year 1980 to the year 2000, the level of poverty amongst immigrants of European descent was reduced by 28%, however, in that same time period the level of poverty for racialized immigrants increased by 361%.

Arabs and Muslim Canadians are a part of these communities at risk. Arabs and Muslims have one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada despite the fact that their level of education is above the national average. This, Mr. Moderator, shows a clear correlation between racism, Islamophobia and these economic disparities. All the recent census and polls clearly show a high level of intolerance against Arabs and Muslims in Canada. The post 9/11 anti-terrorist agenda and the resulting laws and legislations have made Arab Canadians targets of racial profiling, arbitrary detention and wrongful convictions. Mr. Moderator, I would like to make 3 recommendations:

- 1) Hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs should be tackled seriously and urgently
- 2) Arab and Muslim Canadians should be consulted and involved when shaping policies and anti-terrorism legislations.
- 3) Finally public rhetoric, media bias, and political discourse demonizing Arab and Muslims should be monitored and prevented.

Normalizing hate speech against Arabs and Muslims has now become the norm in Canada.



Mohamed Boudjenane

Executive Director
Canadian Arab Federation