

The Canadian Interfaith Conversation
January 2013

Charter Vision

The practice of religion and its impact on the identities of Canadians is an enduring feature of this country. The Charter Vision of the *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* is **to advocate for religion in a pluralistic society and in Canadian public life**. We want to promote harmony and spiritual insight among religions and religious communities in Canada, strengthen our society's moral foundations, and work for greater realization of the fundamental freedom of conscience and religion for the sake of the common good and an engaged citizenship.

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law, and that everyone has the fundamental freedom of conscience and religion.

Issues of the Common Good and Harmony in Society

Beginning from positions of deep respect and a deep acknowledgment of pluralism, we also want to address together issues of concern to the common good of all. We have already been working together on addressing poverty, caring for the Earth, and investing in peace¹.

We also recognize the particular moment we are in, one of working for greater truth and reconciliation between aboriginal peoples in Canada and later arrivals. This situation calls us to deeper understanding of past wrongs and shared future hopes for living in harmony together. Reconciliation is, fundamentally, a spiritual process that needs to be accomplished first in the hearts of Canadians.

Engaging issues involves both a speaking inward to one another and a speaking outward to society and the public.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law...

Article 2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) Freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media communication;
- (c) Freedom of peaceful assembly
- (d) Freedom of association

¹ *A Time for Inspired Leadership and Action*, 2010 Interfaith Partnership, 2010 Religious Leaders' Summit, June 2010.

Local and Canadian

Our preference is for favouring and supporting local interfaith relationship building and collaboration. We also want to facilitate the engagement and bringing together of heads of religious communities in Canada on the issues of the day. Each of these dimensions, local and Canadian, would be incomplete on their own.

Relationships

Overall, we see this as a process of organic development of relationships, not primarily a structural organizational development. Nevertheless, as part of civil society we have an obligation to participate in the issues of the day. When acting together we may also make common cause with like-minded groups.

Acting Together

The *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* will cooperate whenever possible with existing interfaith initiatives, and may also sponsor and facilitate participation and engagement in interfaith events and initiatives locally, regionally, and at the Federal level. Decisions are made on the consensus model. Unless explicitly given the authority by all who are on the contact list, the *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* will not speak or advocate in the name of the organizations or persons who are on its contact list. Likewise, the efforts of the *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* do not bind the organizations or persons who are on its contact list.

Leadership: Chair and Secretariat

The leadership of this *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* rotates from one faith community to another. The Canadian Council of Churches (www.councilofchurches.ca) has played an initiating role through the provision of a Chair and Secretariat from the beginning of this initiative in 2009 until 2012. The Bahá'í Community of Canada (<http://ca.bahai.org>) is providing leadership in the next rotation from 2012 to 2015. Ordinarily the leadership will rotate every three years.

The Chair prepares and leads regularly scheduled meetings. The Secretariat provides administrative and communications support to facilitate the function of this *Canadian Interfaith Conversation*.

A small Executive Committee may be formed composed of representatives from distinct religious traditions to facilitate cooperation. In 2012 the members of that Executive Committee include Aileen Van Ginkel from The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Zul Kassamali from the

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Association of Progressive Muslims of Canada, Gerald Filson from the Bahá'í Community of Canada and Karen Hamilton from The Canadian Council of Churches. Ordinarily a member of the Executive Committee serves for a period of 3 years.

Resources

Regarding human and financial resources, we will continue to focus on a vision that may or may not attract those resources. We endorse and commend those organizations that step in to take up the rotating leadership role and support specific initiatives as they arise.

Participation

Those who are drawn to this charter vision are invited to participate. This is an open, voluntary conversation. Each faith community is invited to work out and define, internally when appropriate, their own participation and accountability. At the same time, those gathered around the table must be representative of their home 'bodies' and in a relationship that is accountable both to the *Canadian Interfaith Conversation* and with the community or organization they are representing. All who participate are committed to being on the journey together.

This may result in the participation of multiple voices from a given faith community. The values behind this Charter Vision define the participation. An honest open dialogue and clarity of purpose is important so that the safety and security of the table is preserved.

Contact List

While there are currently no formal members of the *Canadian Interfaith Conversation*, the secretariat keeps a listing of organizations and representatives/participants who have requested to be on a contact list.

In January 2013 the contact list includes the organizations and representatives/participants named on the following page.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Article 12(1). Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human

Organization

Advent Lutheran Church Calgary
Anglican Church of Canada
Association of Progressive Muslims of Canada
Bahá'í Community of Canada
Canadian Baptist Ministries
Canadian Centre for Ecumenism
Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Canadian Council of Churches
Canadian Council of Conservative Synagogues
Canadian Council of Imams
Canadian Foodgrains Bank
Centre for Jewish and Israel Affairs
Citizens for Public Justice
Colour of Poverty
Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Faith and the Common Good
Hindu Federation of Canada
Institute for Christian Studies
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
KAIROS
Mennonite Church Canada
Millennium Kids
Mosaic Institute
Project Ploughshares
Religions for Peace Canada
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Salvation Army
Tendai Canada
Tengye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Temple
Turtle Lodge
United Church of Canada
University of Toronto Multifaith Centre
University of Winnipeg, Ridd Institute
World Sikh Organization of Canada
World Vision Canada

Representatives/Participants

Ryan Andersen
Henriette Thompson
Zul Kassamali
Gerald Filson, Susanne Tamas
Blair Clark, Lois Mitchell
Norman Lévesque
Jonathan Schmidt
Jonas Abromaitis, Bede Hubbard
Karen Hamilton, Peter Noteboom
Loretta Tanenbaum
Imam Abdul Hai Patel, Imam Hamid Slimi
Paul Hagerman, Carol Thiessen
Len Rudner, Victor Goldbloom
Joe Gunn
Michael Kerr
Bruce Clemenger, Aileen Van Ginkel
Tim Hegedus, André Lavergne
Ted Reeve
Pandit Roopnauth Sharma
Ron Kuipers, Allyson Carr
Brice Balmer, Michael Skaljin
Jennifer Henry
Willard Metzger
Sara Hildebrand
John Monahan
John Siebert
Pascale Frémond
Peter Harkness
Jim Champ, Gillian Brown
Ray Parchelo, Don Purchase
Ven. Lama Tenzin Kalsang
David Courchene
Barbara Lloyd, Gail Allan
Richard Chambers
The Rev. Dr. James Christie
Balpreet Singh Boparai
Doug Blackburn