

# How to be an Ally

## ISLAMOPHOBIA AT THE INTERSECTIONS

This resource is the knowledge production element of the *How to be an Ally: Islamophobia at the Intersections* panel discussion event which took place in Toronto in November 2016

### WHAT IS ISLAMOPHOBIA?

“Islamophobia is defined technically as an irrational fear of Islam and a hatred or extreme dislike of Muslims. However, the term now can also include attacks on Muslims and their faith. Fear has led some to discriminate against, demonize and dehumanize Muslims. Political terrorism, globalization and social media have led to negative attitudes, violence, harassment, discrimination and stereotyping of Muslims.

The Berkley Institute on Racism Studies lists **five prevailing beliefs as elements of Islamophobia**. They report that Islam is often seen as:

- monolithic and unable adapt to new realities;
- not sharing common values with other major faiths;
- a religion inferior to the West; is archaic, barbaric, and irrational;
- a religion of violence, which supports terrorism; and
- a violent political ideology”

-NCCM Islamophobia Guide for Educators

### CONTEXT



In Canada, Islamophobia manifests on a personal, interpersonal and institutional level which negatively impacts the near 940,000 Muslims living in the country.



In recent years, Islamophobic attacks in Canada have doubled.



There has been an alarming rise in attacks against individuals (rather than property damage).



More than 90% of attacks have targeted visibly Muslim women, creating a nuanced intersection of violence known as gendered Islamophobia.



Discriminatory sentiments and attitudes against Muslims are on the rise in Canada.

### HOW TO PRACTICE ALLYSHIP

#### Listen

Listen to the stories that diverse Muslims tell about themselves. Muslim communities are not homogenous! The best way to confront the idea that Islam is unchanging, backwards and monolithic is to expose ourselves to the stories and lives of Muslims living at varying intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, migration, ability, age, class, status and beyond!

Words matter. Consider the language we use when refer to Muslims or Muslim communities in our homes, workplaces, community spaces and within our institutions.

#### Seek out knowledge and invest in your own learning

Consider what biases we have, what stories about Muslims we've internalized and begin the difficult process of unlearning.

Invest in your learning and ask yourself where the knowledge you're consuming comes from: Are these stories that other folks tell about Muslims, or are they the stories we tell about ourselves?

Take responsibility for learning and educating those around you. It's not the sole responsibility of Muslims to confront Islamophobia and shift the narrative.

#### Create meaningful inclusion

Create inclusion of Muslims in conversations surrounding anti-oppression and equity.

Leverage your resources, skills and privilege(s) to make a platform for Muslims to document their experiences, share their narratives and create learning opportunities.

Ensure that events and learning spaces are created, made accessible to those who are most marginalized and chronically excluded within our communities.

#### Let the communities you're supporting define what allyship looks like!

Consider the needs of the Muslims in your life and support people how they want to be supported—sometimes that means advocacy, and sometimes it means taking a backseat and making safer spaces for people to tell their stories.

#### Have difficult conversations!

Confront casual instances of Islamophobia and ignorance surrounding Muslims from the people in your life. Name and identify Islamophobic sentiments, jokes, policies and events. Seeing your allyship in action creates safe spaces for Muslims in Canada and helps to shift our national discourse and global narratives.

This includes holding elected officials and institutions accountable for their actions, policies and words, particularly as we consider new legislations surrounding immigrants/refugees, national security and violence against women which often results in criminalization of entire communities and the marginalization of those who are already vulnerable to these forms of violence.

Be honest about your shortcomings in allyship, and transparent in your learning journey. We all make mistakes, but accountability and a commitment to doing better are the most important steps in allyship.

Remember that Muslims are diverse and all of our experiences with Islam are shaped by other facets of our identities!

#### Thank you!

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**Moderator** - Adil Dhalla



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