

April 9, 2024
Halifax Regional Council

HALIFAX

Combatting Islamophobia & Improving the Safety of Muslim Women and Girls

Recommendation Report

Origin

December 13, 2021, Executive Standing Committee motion (item 2.2.2 Reviewing and Learning from the Steps Taken to Protect Muslim Canadians by Other Canadian Municipalities and Levels of Governments)

The following was before Executive Standing Committee:

A recommendation report from Women's Advisory Committee dated December 2, 2021

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Russell

THAT the Executive Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report that investigates other municipalities' work around anti-Muslim hate and racism and makes recommendations on potential actions to combat anti-Muslim hate and racism, particularly with respect to women, in Halifax Regional Municipality.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED



Source: [Macleans Canada](#)



Source: [CBC News, London, Ontario](#)

Islamophobia

- Islamophobia is defined as stereotypes, bias or acts of hostility and violence towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general
- Islamophobia manifests as individual acts of hate, discrimination and prejudice and as systems, public discourse, policies and practices that perpetuate harmful and discriminatory ideas of Muslim people
- Islamophobia is a serious and enduring issue across Canada and has devastating and lasting impacts on individuals and communities

Intersectionality, Gender & Islamophobia

- Islamophobia intersects with other forms of discrimination, including, but not limited to, sexism, misogyny, anti-Black racism and xenophobia
- Gendered Islamophobia is one of the most common forms of Islamophobia in Canada according to a 2023 report from the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights
- Muslim women and girls who wear visible indicators of their faith—such as the hijab or niqab—experience increased vulnerability to acts of discrimination and Islamophobia

Research Methods

- Review of National Council of Canadian Muslim's (NCCM) recommendations to the Emergency National Action Summit on Islamophobia
- Jurisdictional scan
- Engagements with Muslim women and girls in Halifax
- Scan of HRM efforts already underway

Jurisdictional Scan

- collaborative public education campaigns
- support (including grants and other funding) for community-led initiatives focused on anti-racism, safety, equity, inclusion and building connections across communities
- accessible and culturally responsive reporting options for hate incidents and crimes
- consistent public condemnation of Islamophobia by elected officials and senior leadership
- forums (such as mayoral advisories, roundtables or working groups) to identify issues of Islamophobia and co-create action plans with impacted communities
- strategic plans that expressly address Islamophobia, or that broadly address racism and discrimination, inclusive of Islamophobia
- initiatives that address the intersection of gender-based discrimination and Islamophobia



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Participants at Dartmouth Masjid session

Engagements

- Nearly 100 Muslim women and girls across Halifax shared their experiences, insights and perspectives in engagement sessions hosted in collaboration with the following community partners:
 - Halifax Central Library (with support from the Pakistani Canadian Association of Nova Scotia)
 - Kearney Lake Masjid (both a women's and girl's session)
 - Dartmouth Masjid (with support from the Bangladesh Community Association of Nova Scotia)
 - Al-Barakah Masjid
- Participants shared experiences of witnessing or being targeted by Islamophobic acts and generated ideas for action that could contribute to safer, more inclusive and accessible municipal public spaces

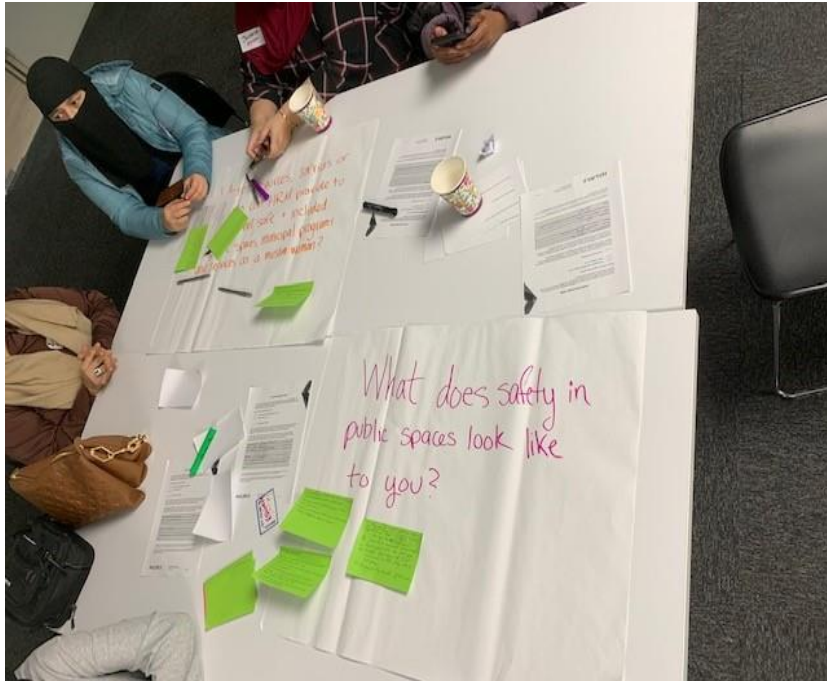
What We Heard

- Increase avenues and reduce barriers for Muslim women and girls to participate in civic life and municipal decision-making
- Explore the development of funding for community partners to co-design, lead and implement anti-Islamophobia initiatives
- Support community-led programming that brings together Muslim and non-Muslim communities to learn, build connections and foster strong relationships
- Increase representation of Muslim women and girls in public spaces by including their images, voices, and stories in municipal communications and marketing materials



Participants at Halifax Central Library session

What We Heard



Participants at Halifax Central Library session

- Establish public education campaigns/resources about recognizing and responding to Islamophobia, debunking harmful myths about Muslim people and understanding diverse Muslim communities in HRM
- Explore development of a third-party/non-police reporting system for experiences of harassment, violence and hate incidents that considers the diverse needs and experiences of residents, including Muslim women and girls
- Provide training and resources to municipal staff to recognize and respond to incidents and reports of Islamophobia with gender-responsive approaches
- Ensure actions to address Islamophobia are reflected in safety plans, anti-racism and anti-hate efforts
- Ensure zero-tolerance for acts of Islamophobia in municipal public spaces

What We Heard

- Establish initiatives that support Muslim women and girls to feel safer accessing public transit
- Establish efforts to support Muslim women and girls to feel included in aquatic and recreation programs
- Consider and reflect the needs of Muslim women and girls in the design of municipal facilities
- Ensure resources about safety and well-being are readily accessible in the diversity of languages spoken by residents in HRM (including languages most spoken by Muslim communities)
- Establish efforts to recruit, hire and retain Muslim women to support their representation in various municipal staff roles, such as those in Police, Fire, Parks & Recreation, Transit and Halifax Public Libraries



Participants at Halifax Central Library session

HRM Efforts Underway

- Municipal efforts include:
 - Regional Council's resolution on January 25, 2022, regarding opposing legislation that restricts or prohibits rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
 - Relationship building and collaboration between Business Units and Muslim organizations in Halifax, for e.g., HRFE and Ummah Masjid and HRP's work in the Hate Crime Unit
 - The Diversity and Inclusion Framework and Champions Table; the implementation of the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Program; the Public Safety Strategy; the Anti-Black Racism Framework
 - Diversification of Halifax Public Libraries collection
 - Intercultural competency training development and rollout
 - Business unit specific actions to make workplaces more welcoming to Muslim employees
 - Multilingual policy development

Summary

- There are municipal efforts underway that align with actions identified in the Emergency National Action Summit on Islamophobia, jurisdictional scan, and by local Muslim women and girls in the engagements for this report
- These initiatives are critical and contribute to combatting Islamophobia and supporting the safety of Muslim women and girls, but the municipality lacks a coordinated/coherent approach to this work
- There is a need to develop an intentional, strategic and collaborative approach toward combatting Islamophobia and the disproportionate impact it has on Muslim women and girls

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the CAO to:

1. Strike a working group of municipal staff to create an action plan to combat Islamophobia and improve the safety of Muslim women and girls, incorporating findings from this report.
2. Direct staff to explore potential sources of funding from provincial and federal government to support this work.
3. Direct staff to return to Regional Council to provide a supplementary report on progress made and resources required for implementation.

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Thank you!