

# THE EVANGELICAL OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

## *The Problem with Hate Speech Legislation* Roland Weisbrot, February 18th, 2017

Hate speech is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as



“speech expressing hatred of a particular group of people.” This definition, which is broad in and of itself, has become quite the hot topic since Canadian Liberal MP Iqra Khalid introduced Motion 103 (**M-103**) to the House of Commons – and for good reason.

Hate speech legislation immediately begs the question of how one draws the line between “speech expressing hatred” and genuine and fair criticism. Unfortunately, MP Khalid’s Motion does

not really help to clarify hate speech and uses very broad and all-encompassing wording such as: “the government should: (a) recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear; (b) condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination.”<sup>1</sup>

As many others have already pointed out, this should raise a few red flags in the mind of any Canadian who values free speech. With such indefinite wording, almost anyone who speaks poorly or critically of Islam may be labelled Islamophobic. This includes fair and genuine critiques of the radical elements of Islam such as Jihadism and Sharia Law. If such a Motion were to pass, no one would be safe: not professors, not politicians, and certainly not religious leaders. In other words, this Motion could effectively legalize the prosecution of groups or individuals who speak of Islam in even the most faintly negative ways. This is unacceptable in a modern liberal democracy which is based on the exchange of ideas and the ability to comment on them, and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.parl.gc.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members/Iqra-Khalid\(88849\)/Motions?sessionId=152&documentId=8661986](http://www.parl.gc.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members/Iqra-Khalid(88849)/Motions?sessionId=152&documentId=8661986)

yes, that includes religious ideas too. This is precisely why free speech includes the right to be critical towards other ideologies, if it is done in a logical, reasonable, and respectful way. After all, I would never argue that actual hate groups such as the KKK and neo-Nazis should be allowed open platforms to spew their pseudo-intellectual and largely unfounded verbal garbage without any repercussions. This is because I recognize that words have power, and with that power they can either cause harm or be constructive. However, the enemies of freedom, such as fascists, communists, and religious radicals, also know words have power, so they are always trying to silence critics – usually in ways that seem perfectly reasonable (such as an anti-discrimination law).

For this reason, we must be ever-vigilant when it comes to the preservation of our rights. Every Canadian, and especially every Christian, should be concerned about the wording found in MP Khalid's Motion and should be letting their local MPs know about how they feel because ultimately, this is not primarily about being able to comment on

Islam. Rather, it is about the preservation of free speech in our nation—  
something for which, I believe, this motion has no respect.

