



NP Comment



# Sikander Hashmi: 'Anti-racist' hypocrisy targets Muslim schoolchildren for their religious beliefs

*Teachers have shown reckless disregard for Muslim students' mental health by trying to force participation in Pride events*

Sikander Hashmi, Special to National Post

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 300 Comments



Muslim schoolchildren in Canada have been subjected to unacceptable and sometimes abusive behaviour by teachers and school authorities who are insisting they disregard their religious beliefs and take part in Pride celebrations, writes Imam Sikander Hashmi. PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES / ISTOCKPHOTO

In a diverse society like Canada, it is not unusual for students and parents belonging to minority faith groups to request exemptions from participating in lessons and activities that contradict their religious beliefs.

Normally, the school hears parental concerns and comes up with a plan to fulfill its duty to accommodate. In most cases, students are provided an alternative lesson that meets curriculum objectives or, if no accommodation can be made, parents are informed before the material is taught so that they can pull their children out of class.

This approach, along with recognition of religious and cultural holidays as well as other needs, has helped create a welcoming and inclusive environment in many public schools in our increasingly diverse society. These efforts are greatly appreciated.

Sadly, this June has proven to be an unfortunate exception for many Canadian Muslim families. Alarmed by efforts to not just educate, but to instead promote practices and beliefs that they believe are contrary to their faith, they have requested accommodation and exemptions, which have been promptly rejected based on “no opt-out” directives. As a result, some families decided to keep their children home on the first day of June, the beginning of Pride Month.

While some teachers and staff were understanding, it led to a furious response from others. In a shocking display of what can best be described as ignorant or at worst bigoted, an Edmonton teacher berated Muslim students who skipped in-school Pride activities, telling them “You don’t belong (in Canada)” if they didn’t support LGBTQ rights, that they were disrespectful, and that they were ungrateful for having their holidays recognized at school.

In a school in the Ottawa area, a teacher distributed a booklet to students in her Grade 5/6 class that was specifically targeted at Muslim youth and which promoted the very practices and beliefs that Muslim families find objectionable. The booklet went as far as discussing sex — even though the Ontario health curriculum only introduces the subject in Grade 7. This “resource,” titled “I’m Muslim and I might not be straight,” is also available on the school board’s website and is the only one on the topic addressed to any faith group.



## *A booklet was specifically targeted at Muslim youth*

Students at an Ottawa secondary school reported staff guarded doors during a Pride Month assembly to ensure that no one left, while others patrolled hallways and one even checked the parking lot to find students who refused to attend.

A parent reported that their child in Grade 3 at another school was told he could not go to recess unless he drew a rainbow. Parents have told me that other students have been threatened with expulsion if they do not participate in Pride Month activities.

Sadly, these attacks on Muslim children, with reckless disregard for their mental health and well-being, came the day after the second anniversary of the murders of four members of the Afzaal family in London in a [hate-motivated attack](#).

The irony is that many who champion anti-racism and anti-oppression practices appear to have forgotten those practices today. Any faith-based disagreements with LGBTQ+ beliefs and practices by Muslim families are immediately dismissed as being hateful. It is difficult to ignore that this gaslighting of the religious rights of a visible minority group is being perpetuated by individuals and institutions who benefit from white privilege, in support of a group that also benefits from white privilege. The image of mainly white teachers and staff targeting minority children, making them feel less than others due to their traditional beliefs, is reminiscent of past colonial attitudes that are now recognized to have caused great harm.

## *Reminiscent of past colonial attitudes*

Schools must be safe for all, including LGBTQ+ children and families. Canadian Muslim leaders and educators have been unequivocal that hate and bullying against anyone, including LGBTQ+ people, are unacceptable.

To be clear, the religious objections by Muslim families are not regarding LGBTQ+ people themselves but rather LGBTQ+ beliefs and practices. For example, cross-dressing and changing one's birth gender is expressly forbidden under mainstream Islamic teachings — not unlike other religions — unless there is physiological evidence to justify such a change. Active participation in activities and celebrations deemed to be morally objectionable, whether it be a celebration of same-sex relationships, pre-marital relationships or a celebration involving pork or alcohol, is prohibited.

Muslim families that find such beliefs and practices to be inconsistent with their faith don't expect others to agree with them, nor do they expect to impose their beliefs on others in a secular society. For instance, a child who has a religious objection to colouring a Ramadan lantern or making Eid cards should be exempted. Their absence would not make Muslim students feel marginalized because the choice to not participate is not an act of discrimination or hate. Similarly, schools should not cancel pizza days for non-Muslim students during Ramadan. Those who are fasting should simply have the option to not eat.

Pride has been celebrated in Canada for decades, and there have been no recorded protests against it by Canadian Muslims until now. Many thought that staying quiet out of respect for the choices of others, despite disagreement, would help foster harmony and respect. This approach now appears to have been mistaken because while Muslims stayed quiet, LGBTQ beliefs and practices were promoted to the point of imposition upon others. This experience tells minorities in Canada that they must remain in a perpetual struggle to promote their beliefs and practices because not doing so will lead to the erosion of their rights.



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It doesn't have to be this way. I have spent most of my life building bridges and furthering understanding, and the current state of tolerance and acceptance in Canada saddens me. As the world becomes increasingly polarized, extremism finds oxygen to flourish. That's something for all of us to be concerned about.

I firmly believe that it is indeed possible — even healthy — for us all to recognize that in spite of our differences and our diversity, we can indeed live together safely in harmony, without forcing our beliefs, values and practices upon others.

*Special to National Post*

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Anon Shah · 2 DAYS AGO

As a Muslim, let me say: Some of the comments here say things like: 'well we shouldn't have to celebrate Ramadan in school,' and I'll say I agree. We don't expect you to celebrate our holiday when you don't believe in it.

In fact, I'll go even further. If I ask you to bake me a Ramadan cake and you say you won't because you don't believe in Ramadan, I won't get upset as long as the dialogue remains civil.

No one should be forced to do things against their beliefs.

It's not the role of the school to lecture students on morality. We send our children to school to learn life skills.

We don't want them being educated in a manner that isn't religiously or culturally sensitive, whether its talking about hetero or homos3xu4l relationships. Intimacy, relationships and values are the role of the parents to teach. Not the government, not schools. You'd think we'd know that after residential schools.

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Jack Ryan · 2 DAYS AGO

I absolutely agree with the Imam in this, forcing this upon children is absolutely toxic. Next thing would be well we are having a pig roast, as such you must participate and eat that. Jews and Muslims cannot eat that, it doesn't make them any less human or have no rights. Similarly, if people don't want to participate in these activities, no one should be forced or belittled to stay. This applies to our workplace then why shouldn't we have this at school, let alone a grade 3 student who doesn't even know how our organs work. These teachers and school board must be disinclined for infringing people's right to participate, just like we are not forced to vote then why should we be forced to stay with this nonsense.

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