

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Following is the text of a statement by Nova Scotian faith leaders concerning the recent controversy surrounding the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad as a terrorist.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, March 7, 2006 -- A message to the people of Nova Scotia from faith leaders representing the

- Alrasoul Islamic Society,
- Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI,
- Atlantic Baptist Fellowship,
- Atlantic Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,
- Atlantic Jewish Council,
- Atlantic School of Theology,
- Beth Israel Synagogue of Halifax,
- Brahma Kumaris in Halifax,
- Chaplaincy of Acadia University,
- Centre for Islamic Development,
- Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches,
- Dalhousie University Chaplaincy,
- First Baptist Church Halifax,
- Halifax Society of Friends (Quakers),
- Hindu Community of Halifax,
- Interfaith Council of Halifax,
- Islamic Association of Nova Scotia,
- Islamic Information Foundation,
- Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada,
- Maritime Muslim Academy,
- Mount Saint Vincent University Chaplaincy,
- Northwoodcare Incorporated - Pastoral Care,
- Nova Scotia Islamic Community Centre,
- Presbytery of Halifax and Lunenburg (Presbyterian Church in Canada),
- Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax,
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Yarmouth,
- Shambhala Buddhist Centre of Halifax,
- Shaar Shalom Synagogue of Halifax,
- Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax,
- Waves & Waters Sangha (Thich Nhat Hanh),
- Wolfville Area Inter-Church Council.

In light of the recent controversy surrounding the publication of cartoons which have offended those who hold a deep reverence and respect for the prophet Mohammed, we, the faith leaders of this province, reaffirm our continued commitment to the promotion of peace, justice, mutual understanding and respect for one another's faith traditions.

Because faith itself seeks expression, we uphold freedom of expression by individuals and institutions as a central value of an open, democratic, and pluralistic society like Canada's. However, we also maintain that the right to freedom of expression can neither be totally absolute nor unqualified. Some limited restraints are necessary and have become universally and legally accepted. No person, for example, has the right to slander another, or in Canada to willfully promote hatred against a group identified by colour, race, ethnic origin, or religion.

All civilized societies recognize that cherished freedoms and rights are always accompanied by responsibilities. Thus, jokingly shouting "fire" in a crowded theater and endangering the lives of others is not a responsible use of freedom of expression.

Similarly, all civilized societies recognize that it is reasonable, on certain occasions, to place limited restraints on freedom in order to preserve the peace and to protect people from violence. Thus, no one has the right to put the life of another at risk, nor is any individual or community free to engage in violence or the threat of violence against another simply on the basis of being offended or insulted.

In the context of the tensions and polarizing issues of our world today, we the faith leaders of this province invite all people of good will to respect the faith traditions of all, to prize freedom of expression, to uphold the rule of law, and to strive to practice non-violence as a way of life.

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