



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

The Ministry of Education must ensure a secular education for all children in Quebec

Montreal, 8th December 2014 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, reminds the Quebec Ministry of Education (*Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*) that all children – regardless of the religious affiliation of their parents – have a right to adequate primary and secondary school instruction, as stipulated by provincial legislation.

The association LPA-AFT has learned of the agreement recently reached between the Ministry and Yeshiva Toras Moshe Academy of Outremont. This Hassidic school was to be closed down, at least according to the declaration made by the new education minister Yves Bolduc in April 2014, because it is without permit and does not teach the mandatory program. Under the agreement, the program offered in the school will not change while the basic primary secular curriculum which that program lacks will be taught by parents at home, without specifying the number of hours to be devoted to each these two components. We have serious doubts about the quality of education that such an arrangement can ensure: putting the most important part of the program under the direct responsibility of parents whose skills are questionable is, in our estimation, totally unacceptable.

The association has also become aware of several legal suits brought against educational authorities by adults who attended Hassidic school as children, in particular that of Yonanan Lowen, of Boisbriand, who accuses government authorities of having deprived him of the basic education to which Quebec law entitles him. In particular, Mr. Lowen denounces the agreement between the Department and the Yeshiva Toras Moshe Academy. Given the problem that some religious schools fail to provide children with an appropriate basic curriculum, the agreement with Yeshiva Toras Moshe Academy is an utterly inadequate solution.

The implications of this issue go far beyond the scope of a few schools associated with a particular religion. Indeed, the underlying problem is the unacceptable habit of labelling children with the religious affiliation of their parents. The program of instruction offered must not be a function of that affiliation. The same program should be provided to all children regardless of their parents' religion. There is no such thing as a Jewish child, or a Christian child, or a Muslim child, or a Hindu child, etc. On the contrary, there are only children whose *parents* are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc. In the opinion of *Atheist Freethinkers*, the imposition of constraints on the education of a child in order to comply with the religious tenets to which their parents adhere is a blatant violation of the child's freedom of conscience.

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