



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

AFT Denounces Quebec's Draft Bill 59 at Ontario Non-Believers' Convention

Montreal, 21st August 2015 – Tomorrow in Kitchener, Ontario a major convention for non-believers, the “Non-Conference” (www.thenon-conference.com), will feature issues of importance to atheists, humanists and secularists. *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, will be represented by its president David Rand on a panel discussing the international campaign to repeal all laws which criminalize blasphemy, including Canada's antiquated law prohibiting “Blasphemous Libel.”

Mr. Rand will also denounce the Quebec government's plan to introduce legislation, draft Bill 59, which is a major threat to freedom of expression and fundamental human rights and would be equivalent to a new anti-blasphemy law at the provincial level. This Bill 59, whose declared purpose is “to prevent and combat hate speech and speech inciting violence,” would grant sweeping new powers to the Quebec Human Rights Commission (*Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* or CDPDJ), allowing it to initiate investigations on its own without having received a complaint, to receive complaints anonymously without protecting the anonymity of the accused, to suppress speech before completion of an investigation, to impose exorbitant fines and to publish a list of the “guilty” on the internet.

“This legislation, if adopted, will effectively criminalize legitimate criticism of religions and other ideologies, whereas the Commission should instead be protecting the right to express such ideas as an essential element of any healthy democracy,” says David Rand.

In addition to draft Bill 59, the Quebec government simultaneously introduced an action plan, ostensibly to fight against “radicalization” but which blames this phenomenon not on the obvious cause of radical Islamist propaganda, but rather on so-called “Islamophobia.” In the words of Mr. Rand, “By putting all Muslims in the same basket and claiming that anti-Muslim prejudice is the motivator, not the result, of radical Islam, the Couillard government is completely at odds with reality. Worse still, in combination with Bill 59, it is giving preferential treatment to religions in general and to Islam in particular by protecting them from criticism.”

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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