



*Atheist Freethinkers*

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

**AFT urges our politicians to eliminate religious privileges and to stop referring to religion-based violence as racist**

Montreal, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, denounces the Justin Trudeau government for favouring individuals who have a religion over those who have no religion. It also denounces inappropriate use of the term “racism”—by Prime Minister Trudeau, by Kathleen Weil, Quebec Minister of Culture, Communications and Immigration and by Régis Labeaume, the mayor of Quebec City—to describe [the recent incident that occurred in the Quebec City region, in which Mr. Singh Khehra was allegedly beaten](#), apparently because of his belonging to the Sikh religion. Police authorities have however denied the religious character of the incident, claiming it not to be a contributing factor.

We of the organization *Atheist Freethinkers* denounce such acts of gratuitous violence. We also express our support for the right of any individual, including the victim of this attack, to wear any sign or symbol of one’s religious affiliation in one’s private life, in accordance with the principles of secularism. However, our politicians must respond to such incidents in an appropriate manner.

Justin Trudeau denounced the attack and declared in a press conference that violence and discrimination are unacceptable not only in Canada but anywhere in the world. However, the Prime Minister himself practises discrimination—positive in this case—by allowing his ministers Harjit Sajjan and Navdeep Bains to wear the Sikh turban while performing their functions as representatives of the state. *Atheist Freethinkers* considers that this discriminatory practise is likely to fuel tensions between the general population and religious minorities.

AFT reminds the Prime Minister that the Supreme Court has ruled that state representatives may not promote a religion while they are on duty. In the judgement rendered by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2015 in which the *Mouvement laïque québécois* and Alain Simoneau opposed the city of Saguenay and its mayor Jean Tremblay (*Mouvement laïque québécois c. Saguenay (Ville)*), article 84 states:

*Where state officials, in the performance of their functions, profess, adopt or favour one belief to the exclusion of all others, the first two criteria for discrimination mentioned above, namely that there be an exclusion, distinction or preference and that it be based on religion, are met.*

We ask, therefore, that the Prime Minister do his duty and cease practising religious discrimination. An on-line petition has been created for that purpose: [RPL petition against religious symbols worn by Canadian cabinet ministers](#). We invite the population to sign this petition in order to join us in fighting this injustice.

Furthermore, Mr. Trudeau, Ms. Weil and Mayor Labeaume have used the expression “racism” inappropriately to describe the Quebec City attack. Recall that a religion is not a race, because religious affiliation is not an essential attribute of the individual. In this case, it would have been preferable to speak of “religion-based violence.”

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

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