



Atheist Freethinkers

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

AFT opposes the “Action Plan on Combatting Hate” Proposed by the Trudeau Government

Montreal, 2nd May 2022 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, expresses its opposition to the National [Action Plan on Combatting Hate](#) announced by the federal government. The plan poses several serious difficulties.

Hatred is a human emotion like love, melancholy, compassion, despair, hope, joy and so on. Emotions must not be banned. Rather, it is violence and calls for violence which must be prohibited by law. It would be counterproductive to attempt to criminalize speech expressing hatred for despots, for narcissistic manipulators or for politicians, cults and religious movements that promote racial segregation, gender apartheid, misogyny or homophobia. Combat violence and physical or psychological exploitation, of course, but to declare war on hatred would open a Pandora’s box allowing the virtue police to interfere in the affairs of the citizenry.

Moreover, in listing the personal characteristics that may be targeted by “hate,” this Action Plan makes the mistake of listing “race, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability” haphazardly. But faith is not a merely personal attribute; rather, it is an adherence to a religious ideology. This religious affiliation is like a changeable political opinion, completely different from an immutable personal attribute like race or sexual orientation. To erase this crucial distinction amounts to neglecting the freedom of conscience of the individual.

Even more disturbing is the government’s refusal to correct [the current legislation against “Hate Propaganda”](#) included in the Criminal Code. In addition to the problematic concept of “hate,” this legislation contains a religious exception, namely paragraph 319(3)b), which grants believers impunity for making hateful statements based on a religious text, a privilege denied to non-believers. Indeed, the texts of several of the world’s major religions include passages that denigrate non-believers, women, homosexuals or certain ethnic and racial groups, some calling for violence, even lethal violence. In 2017, we, AFT, launched petition [e-763](#) requesting that this provision be repealed. Presented to parliament in March 2018, [the Trudeau government peremptorily rejected this request](#).

The Action Plan announces that virtual roundtable discussions closed to the media will be held. We understand that confidentiality may be required for some witnesses, but we oppose the idea of excluding the public and media from all sessions of these discussions. Furthermore, we wonder whether members of “diverse communities” invited to testify will include those women and men who fight against practices which severely restrict their freedom—such as fasting or wearing the hijab for example—imposed by their families or coreligionists.

For these reasons, we, *Atheist Freethinkers*, consider that the government of Justin Trudeau cannot be trusted to legislate in this area. In order to regain a modicum of trust, this government has a duty to repeal the religious exception 319(3)b) in existing legislation. It must also stop sowing confusion by blurring the distinctions between emotions and actions and between race and religion.

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