



Atheist Freethinkers

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Atheist Freethinkers Supports Draft Legislation to Repeal the Religious Exception for Hate Propaganda

Montreal, 28th November 2023 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which defends the rights of atheists and promotes secularism, enthusiastically supports [Bill C-367](#), tabled today by the *Bloc Québécois*, which would repeal the religious exception in Canada’s hate propaganda law. This exception, [paragraph 319\(3\)b\) of the Criminal Code](#), is an anachronistic aberration that should never have been adopted. It states that “No person shall be convicted” of promoting hatred “if, in good faith, the person expressed or attempted to establish by an argument an opinion on a religious subject or an opinion based on a belief in a religious text.” Consequently, an individual can convey hateful propaganda with impunity if his or her remarks are based on a religious text in which he or she claims to believe.

Recall that [Bill C-250](#), in 2003, added sexual orientation to the list of identifiable groups potentially targets of hate propaganda. But this same bill also strengthened the religious exception by adding the phrase “an opinion based on a belief in a religious text” in order to calm the religious concerns of several homophobic Members of Parliament. It is difficult to imagine a less legitimate or more cynical motive than this.

Recall as well that we, *Atheist Freethinkers*, initiated [parliamentary petition e-763](#) which called for the repeal of paragraph 319(3)b). This petition obtained more than 1500 signatures and was presented to the House of Commons in March, 2018. However, the Minister of Justice at the time rejected it out of hand, citing the old version of the paragraph in order to avoid the question!

We consider the repeal of this religious exception to be particularly relevant in the present context where tensions are rising, in several institutions, between those who clearly take sides for one or the other of the two belligerents in the current Middle East conflict. Reprehensible acts have occurred with increasing frequency in Montreal and across Canada. Religions themselves are important instigators of hate propaganda. Various religious texts include passages that denigrate and advocate hatred towards non-believers, women, homosexuals or certain ethnic and racial groups, and that sometimes advocate violence, even lethal violence;

One group’s freedom of religion must never take precedence over the fundamental rights of others and must never, under any circumstances, threaten the bodily integrity or lives of members of groups targeted by hate speech in religious texts. It is also not acceptable that it be used to foment conflict and threaten social peace.

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