Atheist Freethinkers
PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

AFT opposes Bill C-9, a Threat to Fundamental Human Rights

Montreal, Quebec, 22nd October 2025 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (AFT or *Libres penseurs athées* LPA), an association which defends the rights of atheists and promotes secularism, expresses serious concerns about the consequences of Bill C-9, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places)*. This Bill is currently under study by a committee of the House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament. It would impose harsher penalties for crimes "motivated by hatred" against certain protected groups.

According to this Bill, the mere act of impeding access to a building "primarily used for religious worship" becomes a hate crime. AFT questions why the legislator would grant such a priority to places of worship. Is not access to hospitals, schools and scientific research sites at least as important, if not more so, than access to churches, mosques, synagogues and temples?

Furthermore, the Bill defines hatred as "the emotion that involves detestation or vilification and that is stronger than disdain or dislike" while specifying however that a statement which "discredits, humiliates, hurts or offends" is not considered to incite hatred. How can a clear and distinct dividing line be drawn between these two categories, which can easily overlap? Moreover, this definition criminalizes an "emotion." This borders on criminalizing certain thoughts. Thus, the characterization of hatred in this Bill is dangerously vague, opening the door to possible abuse. If, on the contrary, the definition of hatred were limited to ***calls for violence*** against a protected group, these issues would be avoided.

Finally, this legislation must be rejected because of what it ***fails to do***. It amends the law on hate propaganda but leaves untouched one of the worst provisions of the Criminal Code: the religious exception, paragraphs 319(3)b and 319(3.1)b, which grants impunity for "an opinion based on a belief in a religious text." This amounts to discrimination against non-believers and a privilege for religious believers. Furthermore, given the fact that hate propaganda is often based on religious doctrine, this exception is particularly incongruous, even odious, and must be repealed. If a hateful act is motivated by religious belief, this is not a mitigating circumstance, but rather an aggravating one. Hatred is even more abhorrent when based on dogma.

In summary, this law, if adopted, would impose an overly vague definition of hate speech and add an important religious privilege, while neglecting to remove a very serious religious privilege already enshrined in current legislation. These provisions constitute a threat to fundamental human rights and are incompatible with secularism. For all these reasons, AFT opposes Bill C-9.

– 30 –

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
David Rand bulletin@atheology.ca
Pierre Marchand secretariat@atheology.ca
Web site: www.atheology.ca