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Canadians Want Canada's Parliamentarians to Repeal Criminal Code Section 296

Dear Member of Parliament,

Did you know that Canada still has a blasphemy law provision in the Criminal Code? It is **Criminal Code Section 296**. I've provided the text of the law here for your reference

296. (1) Every one who publishes a blasphemous libel is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years

- *(2) It is a question of fact whether or not any matter that is published is a blasphemous libel.*
- *(3) No person shall be convicted of an offence under this section for expressing in good faith and in decent language, or attempting to establish by argument used in good faith and conveyed in decent language, an opinion on a religious subject.*

Over the past two years, Centre For Inquiry Canada (CFIC) has repeatedly expressed our concern that Canada continues to maintain a blasphemous libel law in our Criminal Code; we are concerned with what this indicates regarding our domestic and foreign policy regarding secular human rights, religious freedom, freedom of expression and freedom from religion.

Did you know that in 2015, Norway and Iceland repealed their outdated blasphemy laws? Canada must be a world leader of secular human rights by repealing our blasphemy law!

You can read more about Canada's blasphemous libel law by visiting Humanist Perspectives Magazine at: <http://www.humanistperspectives.org/issue195/index.html> or you can visit the CFIC website <http://centreforinquiry.ca/canadas-blasphemous-libel-law/>.

In light of the many shocking and grievous acts of religious bigotry and violence perpetrated by individuals, organized groups and even governments in recent years, Canadians are desperately

in need of leadership and conviction on these issues. Consider the following recent events in light of a root cause – the doctrine that there are religious ideas that may not be expressed:

- The imprisonment and torture of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia
- Assassination of writers and bloggers in Bangladesh because they are atheists
- Terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo
- November 2015 terrorist attack in Paris
- Murder of Corporal Nathan Cirillo in Ottawa and the subsequent breach of security at Parliament Hill
- The imprisonment of Noreen 'Asia' Bibi in Pakistan and the subsequent murder of Shabaz Bhatti, a Pakistani politician, by his own bodyguard
- Use of this law in a letter to a Canadian citizen (in Quebec) to silence his criticism of a church

Consider also that Catherine Godin, a Canadian representative, attended United Nations Human Rights Council meetings on March 11, 2015 expressing Canadian rejection of blasphemy laws around the world. You can view the meeting using this link: <http://webtv.un.org/watch/id-contd-sr-on-religion-21st-meeting-28th-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/4104613595001>

Blasphemy laws must be opposed and repealed wherever they exist. We must recognize that religious bigotry and persecution is a root cause of human rights violations and atrocities around the world – even in Canada. *All people must have freedom of religion and freedom from religion.*

Canada's blasphemous libel law is an outdated provision that hasn't been used in court since the 1930's – but that merely indicates that the law is "sleeping but not dead". CFIC has observed evidence that at least one law firm has referenced the law in an attempt to silence a critic of their client (a religious organization).

As a leading secular democracy, Canada is in a position to recognize that insult and offence in a colloquial sense is not the same as legal offence - and should not be treated as if it were. With so many complexities, nuances and sensitivities in our modern (and globally respected) multi-cultural society, we can no longer allow mixed messages or interpretations of such a vague law.

By providing you with this letter, your constituent has indicated to you their rejection of Canada's blasphemous libel law and their request to you to assist in repealing this outdated and problematic law. By assisting you will be:

- advancing secular human rights and democracy
- opposing a bad law
- preventing future attempts to misuse this law
- establishing an unambiguous domestic and foreign policy regarding freedom of religion and freedom from religion
- eliminating the option for violations of Canadians' rights to freedom of expression

- eliminating the option for religious organizations and their lawyers from threatening their critics with criminal code violations

Please sponsor a private member's bill to repeal Criminal Code Section 296 or ensure that an omnibus bill includes language which repeals Canada's blasphemy law. Canada should be a progressive human rights leader.

Should you require additional information regarding Canada's blasphemous libel law, please contact me at your convenience or speak with your local constituent who has provided you with this primer.

Sincerely



Eric Adriaans, National Executive Director

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Constituent Name, Signature and Date