ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

Helping People with *Good Reason*

What's Inside:

- President's Report
- Farewell to our President
- Critical Thinking Report
- Report on Branches
- Report on Secularism
- Human Rights Update
- Science Report
- Education Report
- Communications
- Report on Critical Links
- Introducing Podcast for Inquiry
- Financial Report

President's Report

The year ending September 30, 2022 was full of ups and downs, for CFIC and the world. Covid remained a significant issue in the minds of most people for much of the year. Our supporters thanked CFIC for bringing them news about the virus and for distracting them with informative programming about science and critical thinking, by making their biggest ever contributions to our annual fund-raising appeal. CFIC continued to support Omer and for the first time in years, there was a glimmer of hope. Our programming got a real boost with the introduction of Podcast for Inquiry. And, we were thrilled to unveil a new strategic plan to guide us through the coming year.

It almost seems like a lifetime ago when the surge in Covid cases as a result of the Omicron variant created despair in people who had already lost so much time to COVID. As we try to return to normal, while COVID, pneumonia and RSV wreak havoc on our healthcare system, CFIC continues to bring you the latest news about the pandemic, vaccines and the science that tells us that while we may be done with the SARS-Cov2, it is apparently not done with us.

Throughout the pandemic, CFIC enjoyed unprecedented attendance at virtual events. An on-line community was built. CFIC held a virtual conference in November of 2021 which attracted over 100 participants. People also heard from presenters such as Lee McIntyre (How to talk to a Science Denier) and NASA's Umut Yildiz (Water in our bottle is 4.5 billion years old.) We provided a forum for discussion about the situation in Afghanistan, and the basics of humanism. And we held our third annual Protecting Blasphemers event, which highlighted the plight of individuals fleeing persecution for non-belief and featured the leadership of the agencies from around the world which support them.

CFIC also launched Podcast for Inquiry in the past year. The podcast has examined both sides of Quebec's controversial Bill 21 and explored other topics such as democracy, freedom of expression, humanism, microbiology, artificial intelligence, and even looked at the backgrounds of the world's most evil men. In

short, the podcast touches on topics that are interesting, terrifying, fun and controversial.

Much to our surprise, as I write this we are still supporting “Omer” in his effort to come to Canada as an apostate refugee. The good news is that for the first time since we met him, Omer's situation took a positive turn this year. His immigration case has finally moved forward: He has completed all the required interviews and medical tests, and has received his visa to come to Canada. As we continue to wait for this to happen, we continue to thank those donors who are supporting him.

CFIC’s December 2021 campaign was our most successful in the history of the organization. This likely reflected the great engagement we were experiencing at that time. Exiting the pandemic has proven somewhat difficult for CFIC. As some people return to their pre-pandemic events and leave the virtual world behind, it has become challenging to draw sufficient audiences to bring you the big names we attracted at the height of the pandemic. On the other hand, many of our members remain leery of large in-person meetings making it challenging to bring people back together in-person. Perhaps as a result, our 2022 campaign fell short of our goals. I want to thank those who contributed to that campaign, those who generously donate each month and those who purchase a membership with CFIC. We appreciate your support.

This is my final report as president. It is the appropriate time to thank the members of the board and the volunteers who carry out the work of CFIC. I am proud of the organization we have built together. I have every confidence in the leadership of CFIC and will continue to watch and support from the sidelines.

Gus Lyn-Piluso

Farewell to our President

For the past 5 years, CFIC has enjoyed the competent and stable leadership of Gus Lyn-Piluso. He stepped into the role of President in the spring of 2018 and has thoughtfully led the organization ever since. Under his leadership, CFIC has built a strong board of directors, stabilized our financial situation, and provided education on a diverse range of subjects. Gus has had to step down from his role as President and as a Director with CFIC to accommodate increased family caregiving responsibilities.

Gus led CFIC through the pandemic. Under his leadership, and with the committed action of CFIC's excellent volunteer team, CFIC was able to provide a flexible, quick reaction to ensure that our followers had access to the latest scientific information about the pandemic. He also provided leadership through the development and implementation of two strategic plans.

Gus is justifiably proud of his accomplishments over the past five years. Among the most notable are his work to create strong alliances with other organizations, his ability to bring in speakers from across the country and around the world on a wide range of topics and perspectives, and of course his pivotal role in developing Podcast for Inquiry,

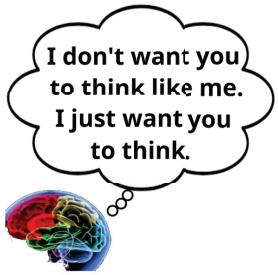
When asked about the future of CFIC, Gus says that he is looking forward to seeing a dynamic, young core group of leaders take us into the future.

Gus will stay on as a member of the Podcast for Inquiry team and, as Chair Emeritus, will consult with the Board of Directors as required. He is also committed to doing whatever else he can to further the mission of CFIC.

The Board of Directors of CFIC wishes to thank Gus Lyn-Piluso for excellence in leadership and to wish him well.Change in Leadership at CFIC.

Seanna Watson (Acting President)

Critical Thinking Report



To counter *disinformation, misinformation and propaganda*, the best weapon we have is a populace that is educated and well equipped with critical thinking skills and resources. This year, CFIC started a project to assemble a Critical Thinking library database. This library will include books, online resources, and links to articles from our website.

Diane Bruce – Critical Thinking Chair

Report on Branches

CFIC branches provide a sense of belonging for our members. Though the past year saw a few branches return to some in-person meetings and events, we continued to see the importance of being able to offer virtual events. While we are based in Canada, we are delighted that technology has provided us with the opportunity to host speakers from across North America and even as far away as Europe and Africa. We have also been pleased to welcome new CFIC members, not only from across Canada, but also from Europe and the US.

Our larger online events have offered the opportunity to present talks by world-class authors and experts in their field, while the smaller gatherings enable community engagement not otherwise available for those isolated for physical, medical, or other reasons.

Our virtual programming this past year included two different Living Without Religion Groups, as well as several weekly or bi-weekly discussion groups and book clubs. Plans for the coming year include in-person and hybrid events. We remain committed to facilitating and maintaining physical and virtual connections for secular, skeptical, and rational people in Canada and around the world.

Seanna Watson – Branch Liaison, Vice President

Onur Romano – Virtual Branch Manager

Report on Secularism

2022 saw CFIC complete our series on the Cost of Religion in Canada. After examining the Canada Revenue Agency filing of tens of thousands of Canadian charities, CFIC was able to determine that Canadian governments subsidize religious institutions by over five billion dollars every year. A secular nation is one where the government neither supports nor suppresses religious expression - and thus, this transfer of funds should be phased out immediately. Read the five-part report series and raise awareness within your communities and ensure your elected representatives hear your voice.

Finally, CFIC was successful in 2022 in changing a government policy that discriminated against non-believers. Those fleeing religious persecution in their home country could claim refugee status under the federal Less Complex Claims program, an expedited process allowing certain people to be recognized by Canada as refugees without a hearing. Atheists being persecuted for their non-belief , however, were not eligible to apply to the Less Complex Claims program. Together with Secular Connexion, Humanist Canada, and the Canadian Secular Alliance, launched a petition "to ensure that non-believers are included in the list of people eligible for any special refugee status". In response, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship changed Canada's policy so that "claims from those who have chosen to be disassociated from a religious denomination or community, or those who hold no religious conviction, including non-believers."

Thank you for your ongoing support - step by step, we are making Canada a more secular nation, and we couldn't do it without you.

Leslie Rosenblood – Secularism Chair

Human Rights Update

In early 2020, we joined an international effort to rescue “Omer”, a persecuted man in Pakistan who was attacked and tortured for publicly doubting Islam. For another three years, our members have dug deeply into their own pockets to help to keep Omer safe while he waits out the very slow wheels of Canada’s immigration process. He is finally approved to arrive in Canada by March 2023. Our Assistance for Apostates program is looking for our next Group of 5 Refugee Sponsorship candidate.

We held an event called “Protecting Afghan Apostates Panel Discussion,” which examined the plight of Afghan non-believers and free-thinkers seeking refugee status in Canada. This panel was cohosted with Secular Connexion Séculière, where Tarek Fatah, Homa Arjomand, Fika Taillon, Doug Thomas, Richard Thain, Robert Hamilton, and Onur Romano spoke.

In December 2021, CFIC held our 3rd annual “Protecting Blasphemers Panel Discussion” event with an international lineup that included: Founder of the Refugee Relief Rana Ahmad, President of Center for Inquiry USA Robyn Blumner, President of Atheist Alliance International Dr. Howard Burman, President of Atheist Republic Susanna McIntyre, hosted by Onur Romano, director of the Atheist Refugee Assistance Program of Ateizm Dernegi International, and the Human Rights Chair of Centre for Inquiry Canada.

Onur Romano – Human Rights Chair

Science Report

This year, CFIC brought you the latest updates, corrected misinformation, and provided information on new and exciting scientific activities. CFIC continued to focus on science literacy as many learnings from the global pandemic begin to coalesce. The year also included a suggestion on how you can get involved with science, with initiatives such as Citizen Science.

CFIC continued to bring you important science programming, including Émile P Torres' discussion on Longtermism, Emma Allen-Vercoe on the importance of microbes to human health, and Green Burials with Mary Nash.

We know that science is about more than health and the climate, so we brought you Critical Links articles and Podcast for Inquiry episodes about the science behind many common myths and sources of misinformation: near death experiences, gardening, electric vehicles, and nuclear energy production.

CFIC looks forward to continuing to provide our readers with current and reliable science information.

Zack Dumont – Science Chair

Education Report

At its heart, CFIC is an educational charity. As the pandemic dragged on for yet another year, CFIC continued to offer programs and events online, making them accessible across the country, and even around the world.

This year, CFIC held 16 on-line events, featuring presentations from authors, academics, and professionals. We coordinated four video lecture series: Indigenous Canada; Biology of Consciousness; What is Climate Change; Introduction to Ancient Philosophy. As well, members came together more informally for learning through book clubs and facilitated discussion groups.

CFIC continues to offer education of interest to our membership, relevant to current events and useful in the efforts to improve critical thinking, alleviate misinformation and promote the scientific method.

Thanks to the volunteers who assisted with the planning and implementation of these activities, and thanks to all those who participated.

Seanna Watson – Education Chair

Communications

As an educational charity, many of the fundamental decisions of CFIC's communications committee revolve around how to get our message across to the public - how do we get more people to benefit from the text, audio, or video content we create on a monthly basis, what platforms to invest our time and resources on, how many volunteers would be required for a campaign, how can we take the message of a scientific worldview, of critical thinking and human rights, of secularism and pluralism, and make it more accessible to the public, in short how to make evidence based thinking more commonplace.

Our volunteers brainstorm ideas, provide graphic design, publish Critical Links, provide technical skills to our website development and YouTube channel and otherwise help to ensure that CFIC’s educational mandate is realized.

This past year our volunteers:

- Provided 12 issues of Critical Links

- Increased the quality and quantity of social media activity

- Added 12 new videos to the CFIC YouTube channel

- Published 33 episodes of audio podcasts on all major podcast platforms

CFIC’s communication activities are completely volunteer driven. A handful of volunteers with diverse technical skills and interests use their time and resources to cater to the mandate of the organization. A sincere thank you goes out to the volunteers who spend countless hours working to promote science, secularism and critical thinking.

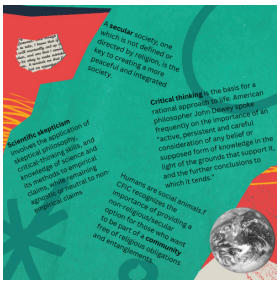
Joshua Jeyakumar – Communications Chair

Introducing Podcast for Inquiry

Pulling together our focus on Communications and Education, CFIC launched “Podcast for Inquiry” in January 2022. Every two weeks, we released a new episode that examined a complex topic with intelligence and nuance, from a secular perspective. Highlights included conversations with Catherine Nixey (author of The Darkening Age), James Turk (vociferous defender of free speech), Steven Pinker (author of Enlightenment Now!, Rationality, and many others), and two episodes about Quebec's Bill 21, one with a guest supporting the bill and the other with someone opposed. CFIC is leading by example, showing how even controversial subjects can be illuminated with the spirit of genuine inquiry, without the hectoring that too often comes with advocacy.

Leslie Rosenblood – Podcast for Inquiry Host

Report on Critical Links



This year was another busy one for Critical Links. We continued to examine diverse topics in science and secularism. We introduced you to the James Webb Space Telescope as well as Citizen Science. We reported on the potential for electric cars to drastically lower our carbon footprint. We were proud to report that, in part because of the efforts of CFIC, persecuted atheists will now be treated equally by Canadian immigration policies, via the Less Complex Claims program.

Critical Links also introduced you to CFIC’s Podcast for Inquiry and continued to provide updates on “Omer,” who will be joining us in Canada very soon. I want to thank Critical Links’ team of awesome volunteers, without whom none of this would be possible. I look forward to 2023 being as fruitful as last year.

Edan Tasca – Critical Links Editor

Financial Report

CFIC's signed financial report is available on our website:
https://centreforinquiry.ca/cfic-2021-2022-financial-statements/