

Canadian human rights chief forced to resign over Islamophobic comments

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Attendees return signs after a rally to highlight Islamophobia, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, on June 18, 2021. (File photo by Reuters)

Ottawa, September 19 (RHC)-- The human rights commission chief for Canada's western province of Alberta has been removed over Islamophobic comments he made in 2009. Collin May, a lawyer from Calgary, was forced to resign after a number of Canadian community organizations called for his removal.

May was appointed to a five-year term as chief of the Alberta Human Rights Commission in July after having served as a member since 2019.

On Monday, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and nearly 30 other community groups sent a letter to Justice Minister Tyler Shandro calling for May's resignation after his Islamophobic comments resurfaced in July.

That year, in a book review, May said Islam was "not a peaceful religion misused by radicals" and instead was "one of the most militaristic religions known to man." In their letter, the NCCM and other groups said May had agreed to a dialogue with the Muslim community, but later declined dates to meet and then also sent letters threatening to sue those criticizing him.

"At a time where brazen attacks on Muslims in Alberta have been growing, specifically targeting Black Muslim women wearing hijab, Mr. May's decision to threaten to sue his critics, while simultaneously suggesting outreach with Alberta's Muslim communities, has been extraordinary and shocking," the groups said. "This behavior cannot be countenanced from the Chair of the Alberta Human Rights Commission."

Shandro asked May to resign, according to Canadian news outlets. Said Omar, the NCCM's advocacy officer, also said in a statement: "We can't have the normalization of Islamophobia and racism in human rights works." Omar thanked Shandro's decision.

May was removed following an order issued by Shandro. The commission's website shows May's term as chief ended this month, but has not commented, announced, or given a reason for the former chief's resignation. The Alberta Human Rights Commission has now placed Evaristus Oshionebo as the new acting chief of the commission.

May had resisted the resignation, with his Toronto-based lawyer Kathryn Marshall telling Canadian media on Thursday morning that he would "not be resigning his position." His lawyer said May will be taking legal action for what she described as his "unjust, unexplained and outrageous termination."

Hate crimes against Muslims across Canada jumped by 71 percent in 2021, according to a report released by the government agency Statistics Canada last month. The study found the number of recorded attacks against Muslims increased from 84 incidents in 2020 to 144 in 2021. In 2019, a total of 182 incidents targeting Muslims had been reported.

Experts in Canada previously told the Middle East Eye that while the country is seen by the outside world as a haven for multiculturalism, Canada has witnessed decades of anti-Muslim rhetoric both from politicians and the media.

Last year, in reports published by the NCCM, it was suggested that the federal government take measures to combat Islamophobic actions, including a budget to support families affected by violence against Muslims. The group also called for Canadian provinces to ensure their anti-racism directorates were well resourced and for municipalities to fund community-based efforts to tackle Islamophobia.



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