



WORLD SIKH ORGANIZATION OF CANADA

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July 5, 2019

Mayor Lisa Helps
City Hall
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

VIA EMAIL: mayorandcouncil@victoria.ca

Dear Mayor Helps,

Re. Support on Quebec's Bill 21

We are writing to request your support and solidarity in opposing the recently passed Bill 21 in Quebec. Bill 21- *An Act respecting the laicity of the State* was passed on June 16, 2019 by the Coalition Avenir Quebec government, banning the wearing of religious symbols. Bill 21 restricts the wearing of 'religious symbols' by public servants in positions of authority such as police officers, judges, prosecutors and also school teachers and principals, among others. The Government of Quebec has also invoked the notwithstanding clause, allowing it to override freedom of religion protections enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms.

The passing of Bill 21 primarily affects members of the Sikh, Muslim and Jewish communities. The law forbids the wearing of 'religious symbols', vaguely defined as "clothing, symbol, jewelry, ornament, accessory or headgear that is worn in connection with a religious conviction or belief and can reasonably be considered as referring to a religious affiliation."

The law will be enforced by 'inspectors' who will supervise compliance with the secularism law and impose corrective measures- targeted employee can be subject to disciplinary measures for failing to comply.

We believe that the passing of Bill 21 is a human rights crisis that must be addressed by all Canadians. This attack on religious freedoms and minority communities is unprecedented in Canada. We request that the City of Victoria stand in solidarity with those opposing Bill 21 and also support the legal challenge against the bill. The City of Brampton recently passed a unanimous motion to this effect and we understand other cities in Canada are considering similar motions.

We look forward to your response and support in this critical matter.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mukhbir Singh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mukhbir Singh
President
World Sikh Organization of Canada

c.c. Victoria City Council