INTERVIEW WITH THE HONOURABLE RAYMOND CHAN

Minister of State (Multiculturalism)



Multicultural diversity in Canada is fed both by birth rates of Canadian-born minorities and by continuing large-scale immigration. Can you look ahead and project what the visible minority, religious and linguistic composition of the population is likely to be in 2017?

Multiculturalism is a fundamental Canadian value. Canada has, to a great extent, leveraged the benefits of its demographic diversity. The great majority of Canadians support multiculturalism, which has enriched their country's social, cultural, economic and political life.

Canada continues to be increasingly diverse and government needs to ensure that policies and programs meet the needs of a diverse country. The Multiculturalism Program recently partnered with Statistics Canada to develop demographic projections of Canada's population in 2017, which will mark 150 years since confederation. The results are published in *Population Projections of Visible Minority Groups, Canada, Provinces, and Regions – 2001-2017*, available from Statistics Canada. The study is based on five scenarios presenting a range of growth rates in the population. It estimates that by 2017 Canada's visible minority population will represent 19% to 23% of the total population. In actual numbers, that means there will be between 7.0 and 9.3 million visible minorities living in Canada. In some cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, if current trends continue, visible minorities will likely become the majority.

Canada is also changing in terms of its religions. In 2001, the percentage of people of non-Christian denominations was 6.3%. According to projections made by Statistics Canada, based on existing trends, the percentage of people of non-Christian denominations in 2017 will fall between 9.2% and 11.2% of the total population.

All this is to say that demographic diversity is a Canadian reality and it is incumbent on us to maximize its value to the benefit of all Canadians.

In much of the discourse in other immigrant-receiving countries, religious pluralism in general, and rapidly increasing Muslim populations in particular, has become one of the most discussed aspects of larger scale immigration policy. How is the Multiculturalism Program addressing religious diversity?

One of the underlying principles of the Multiculturalism Program is to ensure that Canadians of all faiths and backgrounds feel welcome and have an equal opportunity to participate in society. We recognize that some groups experience discrimination, including Muslims, whose numbers grew by 129% between the 1991 and 2001 Censuses, compared to a 5% growth for Roman Catholics, Canada's largest religious group.

We work with a number of government and non-governmental partners to promote respect for all Canadians regardless of religious affiliation and to gain a better understanding of religious intolerance in Canada. In fact, in 2005, our partners at Metropolis will publish a special edition of the *Journal of International Migration and Integration* that focusses on religion and migration, and I look forward to reading it. In addition, the Government of Canada has conducted public opinion surveys to understand better the attitudes of Canadians toward a variety of minority groups, including Muslims. The results from *Population Projections of Visible Minority Groups, Canada, Provinces, and Regions – 2001-2017,* a project that based on current trends Canada's non-Christian population will rise from 6.3% to between 9.2% and 11.2% in 2017.

With respect to the Muslim community, the Government of Canada is concerned about acts of religious intolerance and other forms of discrimination against Muslims just as we are about acts of intolerance and other forms of discrimination against any other religious or ethnocultural minority group. The Ethnic Diversity Survey, which was conducted in 2002, showed that 30% of Muslims said that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnocultural characteristics. This is unacceptable. The Government will continue to combat

discrimination against all identifiable groups, be they ethnocultural, visible or religious.

Ethnicity is an exceedingly complex identity marker and, until the advent of the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), the Census was the only large scale survey conducted in Canada with an adequate sample size to allow for analysis of individual ethnicities. How were the data collected by the EDS used to better our understanding of ethnicity?

The Ethnic Diversity Survey was developed by Statistics Canada in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The survey itself was conducted from April to August of 2002. Statistics Canada officially released the results in September 2003. The survey provided the Government of Canada with information to understand better the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of people in Canada and how these relate to their lives in Canada today.

The survey results have already been analyzed to examine the sense of belonging that various ethno-cultural groups have to their own ethnic group and to Canada. One finding we have noted is that, in general, ethnocultural groups with a relatively strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group tend to have a strong sense of belonging to the country. For instance, 67% of South Asians living in Canada said they have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group, while 88% said they had a strong sense of belonging to Canada. I believe that such research shows that maintaining one's ethnic heritage does not tend to diminish a person's attachment to Canada.

The Ethnic Diversity Survey also gave us a much better understanding of discrimination in Canada. For example, we know that 36% of visible minorities said they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the previous five years based on ethno-cultural characteristics. According to the survey, 50% of Blacks in Canada have experienced discrimination. These figures reinforced the need for the Government of Canada to continue to fight racism and discrimination. This underscores the importance of our ongoing efforts to foster inclusion through initiatives such as *A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan Against Racism*, which offers action against racism on a number of fronts and in a number of key sectors of society.

Extensive work is being done on racial discrimination in Canada, both present and past. In the last budget, funds were announced for both *A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan against Racism* and for commemorative and educational initiatives to highlight the contributions that ethno-cultural groups have made to Canadian society. Can you outline the main components of the Action Plan and which communities' experiences will be the focus of the commemoration and education campaigns?

Thank you very much for the question. It gives me the opportunity to talk about two important announcements in Budget 2005 aimed at fighting racism and fostering cohesion in our society.

The first one is the announcement of $56 million over five years for *A Canada for All: Action Plan against Racism* (Action Plan), and the second one is the announcement of $25 million over three years for educational and commemorative initiatives for communities that were affected by wartime measures and immigration restrictions.

I will comment first on the Action Plan: I am proud to say that it is Canada's first-ever government-wide plan to combat racism. It outlines a series of new and continuing measures that the Government of Canada has committed to in order to achieve a stronger Canada, a Canada that has a shared vision of an inclusive and cohesive society.

The Action Plan builds on the work done by the Multiculturalism Program to fight racial discrimination. It addresses gaps that have been identified in key priority areas. Its objectives are:

a) To combat racism and strengthen social cohesion through anti-racism and anti-discrimination measures;
b) To enhance the implementation of Canada's legislated human rights framework that provides for substantive equality; and
c) Through the example of domestic initiatives to demonstrate leadership and co-operation in the international fight against racism.

We know we have a strong legal framework to address racism. However, this is not enough. That is why the Action Plan emphasizes the importance of building partnerships between governments and civil society. The federal commitment is clear: departments and agencies are working together to implement policies, programs and activities to make a difference in our society. Further, the Action Plan invites all Canadians to work together in six priority areas:

a) Assist victims and groups vulnerable to racism and related forms of discrimination;
b) Develop forward-looking approaches to promote diversity and combat racism;
c) Strengthen the role of civil society;
d) Strengthen regional and international cooperation;
e) Educate children and youth on diversity and anti-racism; and
f) Counter hate and bias.

By embracing this Action Plan, Canadians move closer to realising a shared vision for a truly inclusive society – *a Canada for all.* The Government of Canada is committed to building a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and where no one is left behind.

The second budget announcement relates to the development and implementation of a program that will fund educational and commemorative initiatives. These will be aimed at highlighting the contributions to Canadian society of ethnocultural groups who were affected by wartime measures and immigration restrictions.

Through this program, we want to strengthen the future. We want Canadians to learn from the historical incidents which we are not proud of and understand the contributions made by different communities to our country. Our goal as a government is to foster cohesion, strengthen a shared identity and work together to ensure that Canadians, while learning from the past, are moving forward to build a better future for people from all backgrounds and for generations to come.

There is considerable confusion among Canadians about the mandate of the Multiculturalism Program at Canadian Heritage and of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC). There is a perception that CIC's mandate is to facilitate the integration of newcomers into Canadian society for their first three years and thereafter Canadian Heritage and other government departments and agencies are meant to ensure their full inclusion in the social, economic, political and cultural facets of Canadian society. Presumably the much vaunted two-way-street approach of integration in Canada, where newcomers and Canadian society and institutions are all supposed to evolve, implies that these two portfolios must work hand in hand. Can you describe how they work with one another?

Over the past 33 years of the application of the Multiculturalism Policy, multiculturalism has become a shared value in Canada, a key element of our citizenship. The Multiculturalism Program supports and promotes multiculturalism by facilitating opportunities to support economic, social, political and cultural inclusion to assist people from all backgrounds as they strive to participate and to contribute fully to Canadian society.

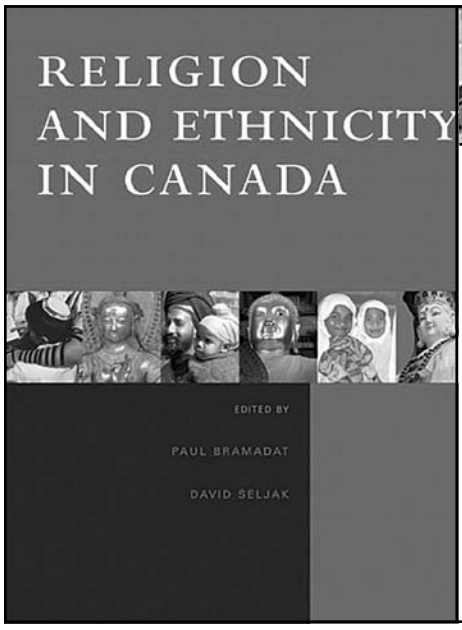
The Multiculturalism Program works with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and other departments, agencies and Crown corporations in developing policies and programs that reflect Canada as a pluralistic society. The Program also works with community and voluntary organizations to build their capacity, strengthen ethnocultural and ethnoracial communities, and enhance cross-cultural understanding. This complements the work done by CIC and is an integral part of the integration process which continues beyond officially becoming a Canadian citizen.

More specifically, the Multiculturalism Program focusses on four mutually supporting priorities. These are:

- fostering shared citizenship;
- promoting cross-cultural understanding;
- encouraging all institutions – both in the public and the private sector – to reflect our country's diversity in their services, policies, and recruitment and promotion practices; and
- combatting racism and discrimination.

The Annual Report on the Operation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, tabled in Parliament by me as the Minister of State (Multiculturalism), provides an opportunity for federal departments, agencies, and Crown corporations to showcase policies, programs, services and initiatives that have furthered multiculturalism in Canada.

The Multiculturalism Program will continue to work with all government and private sector stakeholders to support efforts that reinforce fundamental Canadian values, bridge differences and facilitate the participation of all Canadians in the economic, social, political and cultural life of Canada.





Religion and Ethnicity in Canada

Canadian Edition • © 2005 • ISBN: 0-321-24841-4

Paul Bramadat, University of Winnipeg
David Seljak, St. Jerome's University at the University of Waterloo

Religion and Ethnicity in Canada explores six major religions in Canada: Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam, and Chinese religions. The book also discusses the place of religion in Canadian society as it pertains to the formation of government policies, the ebb and flow of immigration and the economy, and the laws and standards of education.

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