# Interview with Minister Raymond Chan

## Canadian Minister of State (Multiculturalism)

**1) In September, leading experts from around the world met in Prato, Italy for a seminar entitled "Multicultural Futures." They discussed whether multiculturalism remains the pre-eminent strategy to ensure the integration of newcomers and minorities in pluralistic societies. They considered the dramatic shifts in policy away from multiculturalism that have been occurring around the world following specific, often political events. Is the Government of Canada also revisiting its commitment to multiculturalism as an approach to integration and a way of framing the expression of citizenship in Canada?**

This is a good question to begin the interview because it gives me the opportunity to touch in general terms on multiculturalism in Canada, especially in the post 9/11 context that I believe you are referring to. First of all, it is important to recognize that different countries have unique traditions and institutions and therefore different ways of responding to issues of integration and racial and ethnocultural diversity within their borders. In Canada, we have a policy of multiculturalism that has been articulated and implemented taking into account the changing needs and concerns of society, over time. For this reason it is inappropriate to suggest, simply, that we revisit our commitment to multiculturalism. It would be more accurate to say that we are committed to multiculturalism and we periodically rethink the priorities of multiculturalism to keep pace with the changing social, political, and economic challenges that Canadians face.

In the context of the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, one aspect that you mention is indeed how to articulate multiculturalism better as a way of supporting integration which directly and indirectly assists in framing citizenship. In other words, we need to find a way to address diversity and integration issues, including the ongoing challenge of combating racism and discrimination, within the context of the day-to-day, practical expression of citizenship in our communities for both ethnocultural groups and society at large. Ideally, we want to get to the point I think where multiculturalism is associated with our shared interest, as Canadians, in institutional inclusion and equality of opportunity. The idea is that we need to be able to respect diversity and at the same time recognize one another as equal citizens. We want to achieve full contribution of people of all backgrounds to Canadian society where multiculturalism, as a policy and a program, supports the integration while at the same time fostering communities that strengthen this integration.

**2) Recently, there has been some media coverage on the nature of racism and discrimination in Canadian society as indicated by the Ethnic Diversity Survey. What is the Government of Canada in general and the Multiculturalism Program in particular doing to address this situation?**

The Ethnic Diversity Survey provided us with data that shows discrimination remains a problem in Canada. While only 14% of Canadians experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on ethno-racial characteristics, 36% of visible minorities, representing more than one million people, experienced discrimination.

The Government's approach to fighting racism is multifaceted including elements of human rights, civil society, and public education, mechanisms to ensure justice and a comprehensive approach to social change: this is supported at the federal level by the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* the *Canadian Human Rights Act,* the *Employment Equity Act,* the *Official Languages Act,* the *Pay Equity Act,* and the *Multiculturalism Act.*

Most recently in the October 5, 2004 Speech From the Throne, the Government of Canada pledged to recognize Canada's diversity as a source of strength and innovation, to remove barriers to opportunity, and to "take measures to strengthen Canada's ability to combat racism, hate speech and hate crimes, both here and around the world". This commitment will be implemented through forward-looking measures undertaken by government departments to combat racism.

The Multiculturalism Program works collaboratively with community organizations to support activities that break down barriers to full participation for all Canadians, enhance the implementation of Canada's human rights framework, and demonstrate federal government leadership in eliminating racism and promoting equal citizenship. The Government of Canada will continue its efforts to develop a multi-faceted approach to combating racism, which is based on partnerships with other government departments and community groups. The intent is to attack racism at all levels and all forms.

**3) In recent years there has been a heightened interest in policing and security and its impact on minorities. What actions has the Multiculturalism Program taken to address concerns by ethnocultural groups related to discriminatory**

**practices, including racial profiling? What has the Government of Canada done to ensure that public safety and anti-terrorism measures have not disproportionately affected minority Canadians?**

On the issue of security and racial profiling, the Multiculturalism Program is working in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, other levels of government, police services, and institutions, to improve collaboration between ethno-cultural communities and law enforcement agencies across Canada, and to facilitate sharing of best practices. The Program has also hosted a *National Forum on Policing in a Multicultural Society* and helped to fund a Law Enforcement Aboriginal Diversity (LEAD) Network to establish a template for law enforcement agencies to monitor their progress in serving ethnocultural and Aboriginal communities. As such, the Multiculturalism Program facilitates the dialogue between law enforcement agencies and ethnocultural communities in view of assisting police officers to be better equipped and trained to serve Canada's multicultural population.

Since the proclamation of the *Anti-Terrorism Act,* the Multiculturalism Program has fielded various concerns about the impact and perception of the *Act* among ethnic minorities in Canada and has met with the representatives of various Canadian religious and ethno-cultural organizations over the past few years.

It is also worth mentioning that a key element of the federal government's national security policy is the establishment of the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, created to engage Canadians and the Government of Canada in an ongoing dialogue on national security in a diverse and pluralistic society. I have participated actively in the announcement of this policy and in urging members of ethnocultural communities to submit nominations to the committee which will provide an opportunity for dialogue on security matters.

Beyond these measures the Multicultural Program will continue to work with communities to ensure that national security is a complementary component to our Canadian values of individual rights and freedoms.

**4) Le plus récent discours du Trône engage le gouvernement du Canada à l'égard d'une politique d'égalité des chances « de sorte que la prospérité puisse être partagée par tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes ». En même temps, il engage le gouvernement « à faire valoir les intérêts du Canada et à projeter nos valeurs dans le monde ». Comment le multiculturalisme règle-t-il la question d'égalité des chances et comment influence-t-il ce qu'on appelle communément nos intérêts et valeurs en tant que Canadiens et Canadiennes ? Les valeurs, les responsabilités et les intérêts sont-ils différents pour des personnes différentes – par exemple, les groupes minoritaires et majoritaires respectivement ?**

Ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est que travailler à établir un terrain d'égalité ou l'égalité des chances, comme vous dites, nécessite de sensibiliser davantage le public au fait que l'inclusion et la citoyenneté égale sont parmi les « valeurs » et les « intérêts » les plus importants de notre société. Ainsi, l'égalité des chances en soi devrait être promue comme une valeur canadienne commune ainsi que comme une responsabilité canadienne partagée.

Le Programme du multiculturalisme a contribué à l'objectif d'égalité des chances de plusieurs points de vue, mais, en fait, deux principaux moyens ont permis de diriger cette contribution. La première approche a consisté à promouvoir les identités de diverses communautés du Canada. La deuxième approche a consisté à influencer l'intégration positive des Canadiens et Canadiennes de diverses origines dans la vie économique, sociale, culturelle et politique dominante du pays. De plus en plus, cette question d'intégration est devenue la plus pertinente à l'appui de l'égalité des chances. Il va sans dire que la question d'intégration comprend un programme pour lutter contre le racisme et la discrimination.

Cependant, en ce qui concerne notre identité collective en tant que Canadiens et Canadiennes, nous sommes tous responsables de valeurs publiques ou canadiennes comme l'inclusion et la citoyenneté égale. Autrement dit, nous avons tout à gagner de promouvoir ces intérêts.

Quant à votre question sur les valeurs et responsabilités différentes pour des groupes différents, je pense qu'il est évident que les personnes d'origines ethniques, raciales et religieuses différentes ont des points de vue divergents selon la question – la définition même du pluralisme. Cependant, en ce qui concerne notre identité collective en tant que Canadiens et Canadiennes, nous sommes tous responsables de valeurs publiques ou canadiennes comme l'inclusion et la citoyenneté égale. Autrement dit, nous avons tout à gagner de promouvoir ces intérêts.

**5) How does the Multiculturalism Program and the Government of Canada ensure that newcomers and minority Canadians are able to participate fully in each of the social, economic, cultural and political facets of Canadian society?**

This is a very important question and the issues raised are very close to my heart. In the Multiculturalism Program, we focus on these exact issues and we would like to increase our efforts to achieve even greater results for newcomers and minority groups.

In terms of economic participation the Multiculturalism Program influences the Foreign Credentials Recognition agenda by participating in multilateral initiatives with federal partners, provincial and territorial governments, professional accreditation bodies, licensing boards and employers. The program also supports immigrant-led organizations and associations. In the recent past, the Department of Canadian Heritage announced two projects funded by the Multiculturalism Program that have

successfully built two provincial networks of organizations of immigrant professionals, one in Ontario and the other one in British Columbia.

With respect to the social participation goal, the program is funding initiatives that bring different ethno-cultural communities together to address shared issues. We continue to work with established organizations and groups as well as assist newer emerging communities to increase their capacity to participate. We have also supported initiatives that examine the issues of the intersectionality of ethno-racial background and identity.

We continue to ensure that multiculturalism as a philosophy, ideology and reality is well understood at all levels. The Program works closely with other government departments and supports them in ensuring that the principles of multiculturalism are promoted. We continue to support community action initiatives to improve inter-cultural understanding and cooperation. Support is provided for research and policy planning in the area of economic participation, labour market inclusion and working with other government departments to develop partnerships on how to best address gaps and shortcomings faced by certain at-risk groups. The program also supports full participation of visible minorities and other groups in all aspects of Canadian culture.

It is my goal to continue to support and increase activities aimed at full participation of social, economic, cultural and political facets of Canadian society.

**6) Le Canada est réputé pour sa politique de multiculturalisme, mais certains critiques soutiennent qu'elle semble seulement favoriser des groupes minoritaires ethniques et raciaux. Est-ce vrai ? Sinon, pourquoi les Canadiens et Canadiennes sont-ils confus quant aux objectifs du multiculturalisme ? Par ailleurs, comment le gouvernement assure-t-il la promotion du multiculturalisme comme identité pour tous les citoyens et citoyennes, et pas seulement pour les immigrants qui sont arrivés récemment au pays ?**

Le multiculturalisme, c'est pour tout le monde. C'est le message que nous voulons promouvoir et répandre dans l'ensemble de la population canadienne. Ceci étant dit, je suis cependant conscient que les sondages d'opinion publique montrent que les Canadiens et Canadiennes sont perplexes quant au but de la politique. Cette confusion peut être le résultat des priorités du multiculturalisme en évolution au cours des 30 dernières années. Les premières années, le multiculturalisme cherchait davantage à préserver l'identité culturelle minoritaire ethnique – ce qu'on pourrait qualifier d'interprétation « folklorique » ou « artistique ». Toutefois, depuis le milieu des années 1980, le multiculturalisme s'est de plus en plus réorienté sur les questions d'égalité, d'intégration et de participation ainsi que sur ce qui touche la lutte au racisme et à la discrimination. Par conséquent, je crois que nous devons faire connaître l'évolution du multiculturalisme. Nous devons continuer de promouvoir les changements qui y ont été apportés.

Néanmoins, les sondages d'opinion montrent régulièrement que le multiculturalisme est populaire et que les Canadiens et Canadiennes considèrent de plus en plus le multiculturalisme comme un élément positif et essentiel de notre identité nationale. Ainsi, nous devons nous efforcer de combler le fossé entre le soutien général apporté à la politique et une véritable compréhension de ce qu'elle vise à accomplir. Cela me ramène à ce que j'ai dis au début de l'entrevue au sujet de la nécessité de promouvoir le multiculturalisme en termes d'inclusion et de citoyenneté égale. Le multiculturalisme signifie la promotion de la pleine participation de tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes à la vie de notre société, sans toutefois enfreindre leur droit à leur identité individuelle et culturelle.

**7) Do you believe multiculturalism has a future as a concept to guide Canada's shared citizenship model?**

Absolutely. Multiculturalism is at the heart of Canada's fundamental values and Canadian identity. The very notion of shared citizenship calls for a clear balance between rights and responsibilities, and this concept applies to all, that is, multiculturalism as ideology, as philosophy, and as government program is for all Canadians.

The future lies in finding ways for Canadians to connect with one another as individual citizens and this can only occur where they view each other as sharing similar interests and goals. Multiculturalism is there for all – to articulate and advance those shared interests and goals. Multiculturalism *does* have a future: a future which provides Canadians with the capacity and the opportunity to participate in Canadian society regardless of race, ethnicity, cultural or religious background; a future where Canadians share a sense of pride and civic life; a future where Canadians can live in an inclusive society built on inter-cultural understanding and citizen participation.