

January 3, 2007

The Honourable Jason Kenney,
The House of Commons,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

VIA REGULAR MAIL AND ELECTONIC MAIL

Re: Comments about Human Rights Complaints against Maclean's Magazine

Dear Mr. Kenney,

I write to you today on behalf of four law students who have filed human rights complaints against Maclean's Magazine and have assisted the Canadian Islamic Congress in doing the same before the British Columbia and Federal Human Rights Commissions.

We noted a recent quote attributed to you by CBC News, regarding our complaints:

"To be attacking opinions expressed by a columnist in a major magazine is a pretty bold attack on the basic Canadian value of freedom of the press and freedom of expression," Kenney said in an interview. "I think all Canadians would reject that kind of effort to undermine one of our basic freedoms."

We would like to express to you directly our concerns about your statement, which has the potential to prejudice a legal proceeding in which the Muslim-Canadian, Arab-Canadian, and various other communities and groups have a direct interest.

The subject matter of our complaints is a Maclean's article ("The Future Belongs to Islam") which represents that Muslims living in the West are part of a global conspiracy to take-over Western societies and subject them to oppressive Taliban-style Islamic law. Among other allegations, it alleges that Muslims share the same goals as terrorists, that Muslims are "hot for jihad", and that Muslim have far too much freedom of movement in Western society – a problem that can be traced back to immigration and multiculturalism.

Furthermore, this article is not an isolated incident; Maclean's has in fact published at least eighteen lengthy articles with similar content between January 2005, and July 2007. Not a single counter view to these articles has been published.

The comments that have been attributed to you, criticize our complaints as being contrary to free expression. In fact, our complaints were launched after a meeting with Maclean's senior editors, in which we proposed that they publish a counterinterview to this article from a mutually acceptable

author. The response we received was that Maclean's "would rather go bankrupt" than publish any response. It was due to this response that our human rights complaints were launched.

Since then Maclean's has published several articles tainting our complaints and attacking the human rights commissions, contrary to the human rights codes which prohibit retaliation against a complainant. Please note, that this retaliation is against the Muslim-Canadian community at large since we are representing not just our individual interests, but also the interests of the Muslim-Canadian community.

In this environment, we find it particularly inappropriate that a senior member of the government, particular the Minister for Multiculturalism, should be commenting on our complaints in the manner that the CBC has attributed to you. It constitutes, in our view, undue interference with a legal proceeding.

We will be announcing shortly, a coalition of Muslim, Arab and non-Muslim advocacy organizations around the issues of: (1) The rights of communities to respond to defamatory publications in media, (2) The rights of communities to pursue their basic human rights as guaranteed by the human rights codes, and (3) protection and consolidation of the human rights codes and commissions.

It is of direct interest to us and our coalition partners (and indeed to ordinary Canadians) to know if you and / or the Harper government support the notion that Maclean's Magazine (and other media organizations) are entitled to publish material of the nature described above and furthermore, to indicate that they would prefer bankruptcy to the publishing of a representative response to such material.

We hope to hear from you at your earliest convenience in this regard.

Thanking you,


Khurrum Awan

For: Khurrum Awan, Muneeza Sheikh, Naseem Mithoowani, and Daniel Simard

CC:

Jesse Greener - Ontario Chairperson, The Canadian Federation of Students

Pam Frache – Education Director, The Ontario Federation of Labour

James Clark – Toronto Coalition to Support the War.

Ali Mallah – National President, The Canadian Arab Federation

Imam Dr. Zijad Delic – Executive Director, The Canadian Islamic Congress

Zafar Bangash – Director, The Islamic Society of York Region

Mohamad Shokr – Coordinator, The Muslim Unity Group

Imam Salam Elmenyawhi – The Muslim Council of Montreal

Dr. David Liepert – Spokesperson, The Muslim Council of Calgary

Mumtaz Akhtar - The Ottawa Muslim Association
Sikandar Khan – The British Columbia Muslim Association
Dr. Hafizur Rahman - The Islamic Society of Kingston
Khalid Tarabain - The Canadian Islamic Centre, Edmonton
Dr. Jamal Badawi – The Islamic Information Foundation, Halifax
Fayyaz Mehdi – The Muslim Services, Toronto
Mohamed S. Kamel - Forum Musulman Canadien \ Canadian Muslim Forum (FMC-CMF)