

*Government Orders*

Unfortunately hate crimes have become alarmingly prevalent in our society. Expressions of hate are numerous and range from attacks by skinheads on gays to the desecration of synagogues to the killing of a native Cree. These attacks target virtually all minority groups and most of the time are violent and malicious. This can no longer be tolerated.

Statistics have made it apparent that hate motivated crimes are drastically increasing in our country. B'nai Brith has identified over 40 hate groups in Canada. Crimes targeting specific populations are on the rise. Hate crimes make many Canadians feel vulnerable and afraid. We must not tolerate this any longer in Canadian society. It is time that Canada recognized hate crimes as a particularly serious category of crime which attacks our diverse society. Bill C-41 sends a clear message that these hate motivated offences will not be acceptable.

This rise in hate motivated crimes has also been recognized across the country by police. As a result hate crime units have been established to address the changing nature of crime. The Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police bias crime unit has already had an effect on hate motivated crimes in the national capital region. It has been credited with contributing to a significant decrease in all hate motivated crimes in Ottawa. As a first of its kind it will act as a model for other cities seeking to address this problem.

Canadian authorities have had their hands full trying to monitor and contain the hate movement. Bill C-41 is an important measure to help them protect innocent Canadians from persecution and harm. Section 718, 718.1 and 718.2 of Bill C-41 reform the sentencing provisions for hate crimes. These amendments are welcomed and endorsed by police units across the country.

In the past, court rulings have recognized the underlying principle that hate motivation should be taken into consideration in sentencing. These sections will ensure through legislative means this principle is applied uniformly across the country.

I firmly believe that specific legislation is required to address hate motivated crimes in Canada. These crimes are more serious than those committed against individuals and therefore should be treated more harshly under the Criminal Code.

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For example, it is horrible that a young man walking home would be attacked because he was targeted as a member and therefore a representative of a specific group. This indicates that the crime is premeditated and committed with the specific intention of bringing deliberate harm and persecution to a targeted group.

Not only do hate motivated crimes make all members of a targeted group feel vulnerable or afraid, but unfortunately by their very nature they are often repeated crimes. Therefore, it is imperative that we punish these crimes more harshly.

Those committing the crimes must realize that their prejudice and hatred must not be tolerated by Canadian society and their sentence must reflect Canadians' collective condemnation of the crime. Only by recognizing the seriousness of these acts of aggression and punishing them accordingly under the Criminal Code can Canada combat this wave of hate propaganda.

Many of us assume that Canada is an open, tolerant and inclusive society. We must not take that for granted any longer. Canada has been changing over the past few decades. Unfortunately, some people do not like the changes and stubbornly resist them. That in turn creates more problems. People begin to scapegoat certain groups as instigating the problem. This is not right.

We must not blame groups for our problems in society. It is much easier to blame others than to seek solutions for our complex problems. We must not fall prey to this. We must work together to build consensus and effectively manage changes occurring in our society. However, we must also feel that it is crucial to protect individuals and groups from hate motivated crimes.

Hate crimes are almost invariably based upon these characteristics: race, nationality, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation. Therefore, it is necessary to spell out these characteristics in order to ensure sentencing provisions in the legislation are upheld in court.

I have received letters from constituents regarding Bill C-41. In particular, they are concerned with the inclusion of the term sexual orientation. First, the bill does not confer any special rights, but rather protects all Canadians. Every Canadian has a nationality, a race, an age, a gender and a sexual orientation.

The bill will not grant special rights to homosexuals, nor will it in any way affect the traditional family. I have assured my constituents of these facts, but I will also take advantage of the chance to reiterate that this is a sentencing and crime bill which will protect all victims of hate crimes. It has absolutely nothing to do with the recognition of same sex marriages, nor will it destroy the traditional family.

I firmly believe that all Canadians should be protected from vicious, targeted acts of aggression. I certainly support the inclusion of sexual orientation as a ground for hate motivation in the legislation. The inclusion of sexual orientation as a ground for hate motivation recognizes the fact that criminal acts which are intended to terrorize the gay and lesbian community are on the rise and unfortunately have become a problem in Canadian society.