

Government Response to the Report of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

The Government has been working in most of the areas identified in the Report. As well, the Government has established a Working Group on this issue. The FAC Departmental Working Group on Relations with Muslim Communities has been tasked to work on the issues contained in the Government's Response and to serve as a focal point within Foreign Affairs Canada for cross-cutting issues dealing with relations with Muslim communities and for discussions and management of issues relevant to Islam in Canada and in our relations with other countries.

There are no funding implications at this time as all activities are covered under existing budgets.

Now more than ever, relations with the Muslim world are important to Canada's security and prosperity. The Government therefore appreciates the careful work the Committee has undertaken to study this matter, and formulate the broad range of recommendations included in its report.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Government of Canada should explicitly recognize relations with the countries of the Muslim world as an important area of foreign policy attention and strategic planning. In addition, the Government should use the forthcoming international policy review as a means to deepen Canadian public engagement on issues of foreign policy development involving Muslim communities in Canada and relations with Muslim countries.

The Government recognises relations with the countries of the Muslim world as an important issue which warrants heightened foreign policy attention. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, comprising 1.4 billion Muslims. Together, these individuals constitute majorities in nearly 50 countries. Moreover, Canada now has over 600,000 Muslim Canadians, which represents a 130% increase in 10 years.

The Government has already taken action which supports the Committee's recommendations, including the support of a visit of McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies' Dr. Turgay to South and Southeast Asia to report on developing dialogue with Muslim communities; a conference at McGill entitled "Canada and Islam in the 21st Century", including participants from 11 countries; and an Asian Journalists Study Tour of Canada, including participants from seven countries. As well, the Government has established a Working Group on this subject. The FAC Departmental Working Group on Relations with Muslim Communities (WGMC) initial objectives are to work on the issues contained in the Government's Response and to serve as a focal point within the Department of Foreign Affairs for cross-cutting issues dealing with relations with Muslim communities and for discussions and management of issues relevant to Islam in Canada and in our relations with other countries. This group will also explore ways to involve Muslim communities in Canada in its work. Finally, noting the importance of bolstering our understanding and engagement with the Muslim world, the Government established the Cross-Cultural Roundtable as part of the April 2004 National Security Policy. The Roundtable will engage in a long-term dialogue on matters related to national security as they impact a diverse and pluralistic society.