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DR. ELMASRY MEETS HIS WATERLOO



**By Professor Ed Morgan
CJC National President**

Democracy is a wonderful thing. Its freedoms ensure that individuals with divergent views will have the opportunity to speak their mind. But it can make for a rough game, with some victories and defeats along the way.

As rough as the game can be, though, it does have rules. Dr. Mohammed Elmasry, a professor of engineering at the University of Waterloo and the president of the Canadian Islamic Congress, demonstrated the outer limits of those rules just this week.

The incident occurred when Dr. Elmasry made an appearance on the popular *Michael Coren* TV show. In the course of the program, Elmasry stated his view that all Israelis aged 18 years and older are legitimate targets for attack. Elmasry's logic? Since Israel has a universal military draft, all Israelis above a certain age are combatants whether or not they are in uniform; whether or not they are carrying a weapon. One could logically extend Elmasry's observation to include all Israelis, regardless of where they live. After all, if a person is an evil military enemy on one side of the border, he or she is the same enemy when visiting the other side of the border or across the ocean. Elmasry's comments were aimed at justifying the acts of terror that have plagued Israelis from Tel Aviv to Taba, from Megiddo to Mombasa.

The worst part about these comments is that they came from a prominent spokesperson and academic. Israel, sadly, is a country where even the hallowed halls of the academy have not been spared the suffering spawned by indiscriminate terrorism. Of course, according to the logic expressed by Dr. Elmasry on the *Michael Coren* show, since the Hebrew University cafeteria that was bombed two years ago can be presumed to have been populated by over 18 year olds, this was a fair tactic in the ongoing Middle East war.

Are we surprised at the content of these comments? Well, the organization that Dr. Elmasry heads has one other known spokesperson, its vice-president, Ms. Wahida Valiente, who wrote the following passage in an article commemorating last year's Black History Month:

Most notably, the Qur'an rejects the Jewish concept of racial superiority; that is, the status of their being a chosen people. The concept is not only racist, but directly contradicts the Qur'anic worldview of racial equality. Unfortunately, the Jewish idea of being 'chosen' not only institutionalized racism, but also set a terrible precedent for human history in general, where racial superiority claims became the norm, the divisive standard by which all others, those not like us, were to be judged and treated.

If the Bible and Jewish beliefs are seen to be responsible for setting the historic precedent for racism and other divisive standards, then



Mohammed Elmasry (left) with TV host Michael Coren.

nothing takes us by surprise – including the vilification of the people of Israel today. What all of this demonstrates is that there are groups in Canada who not only play rough, but who play contrary to the rules of the Canadian game.

On the other hand, we are heartened by the strong voices of condemnation that have been issued against this vicious form of intolerance, from both within and outside of the Muslim community. The Elmasry affair has in some ways been a lesson in the bounds of public discourse. Canadians of all stripes have come to view his justification of attacks on civilians as beyond the pale of political disagreement and well into the forbidden realm of endorsing violence against an identifiable group. Let us hope that Canadian values triumph, and that this kind of debased viewpoint has once and for all met its Waterloo.

CJCONT advocates in Bay employment dispute

Evie Walton never thought that not being available to work on Saturdays would impede her from getting a job as a make-up artist at The Bay.

But after failing to secure a position at two different downtown Bay stores because each of the managers who

interviewed her told her they couldn't hire someone who wasn't available to work on retail's busiest day of the week, she decided to take further action. That's when she contacted Len Rudner, Director of Community Relations for CJCONT.

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CJCONT TO RALLY FOR DARFUR NOV. 7 AT QUEEN'S PARK

As part of a coalition of more than 40 community groups, Canadian Jewish Congress Ontario Region is helping to lead the call to the international community to step up its efforts to protect the people of Darfur.

The coalition, called Canadians for Action in Darfur, will be holding a major rally at Queen's Park on Sunday, November 7 from 2 to 3 p.m.

The coalition is chaired by CJCONT/ UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, The Canadian Council of Churches and KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives). It counts among its members religious and community groups from across the country, including Ve'ahavta, World Vision Canada and Amnesty International Canada.

"It's time for Canadians to stand together and tell the world that the atrocities being suffered by the people of Darfur are not acceptable," said Joel Richler, CJCONT chair.

"More than 70,000 innocent Darfurians are dead, and more than 1 million have been displaced from their homes," said Simon Rosenblum, CJCONT's director of public policy, who is helping organize the rally. "The more people who participate, the more impact we will have. We know this city won't let us down," he added.

CJC has been working to bring more attention to the situation in Darfur for months. After sending a letter earlier this summer to the Prime Minister, a meeting was held with Canada's representative to the UN to discuss the situation and encourage a clear condemnation of the atrocities in Sudan.

"Prime Minister Paul Martin's speech before the UN General Assembly in September about the crisis in Darfur was a good start, but is not nearly enough. More pressure on the international community must be brought to bear if real change is going to take place in Sudan," Rosenblum added.

"The African Union Mission needs to be bolstered, and its mandate must be changed to become a peace enforcement mission," he said.

"The opinion of the Canadian public, represented by the 40 or so community organizations taking part in the rally, is crucial in urging the politicians who can mitigate an end to the crisis in Darfur to do so," said John Lewis, KAIROS program coordinator and one of rally's other chief organizers.

"A man-made crisis like the one in Sudan needs more than just humanitarian assistance to save lives: it also needs constant pressure on the groups committing violence to stop and return to the peace negotiations," he noted.

Canadians for Action in Darfur

Below is a list of coalition members participating in the November 7 rally:

Canadian Jewish Congress/UJA Federation of Greater Toronto
 KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives)
 The United Church of Canada
 World Vision Canada
 Holocaust Centre of Toronto
 Ve'ahavta
 Darfur Association of Canada
 World Federalists Movement
 CASTS
 Amnesty International
 Canadian Council of Churches
 Simon Wiesenthal Centre
 Free the Children
 Centre for Social Justice
 Project Ploughshares
 Ontario Council for International Cooperation
 CAMEO
 Oxfam Canada
 Toronto Residence In Partnership
 Canadian Council of Reform Judaism
 Social Justice Committee (U of T)
 Journalists for Human Rights
 Armenian National Committee of Canada
 Canadian Auto Workers
 Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation
 Toronto Parent Network
 Freedom Quest
 Canadian Aid for South Sudan
 Canadian Vietnamese Professionals
 B'nai Brith Canada
 Native Men's Residence
 Ontario Confederation of Catholic Bishops
 Presbyterian World Service and Development
 Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (Anglican Church of Canada)
 Canadian Steelworkers Humanitarian Fund
 Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
 Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
 Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario
 PEN Canada
 Human Rights Watch
 Mennonite Central Committee

Sharing concerns in the community

Earlier this month, Jewish community leaders met to discuss their concerns with David Zimmer, Member of Provincial Parliament for Willowdale. They discussed community security, school funding, child poverty, elder care, and improving social housing in the community. Pictured (l-r) are: David Zimmer; Jewish community leader David Sefton; Nancy Singer, Executive Director of the Kehilla Residential Program; CJCONT's Bernie Farber; and Ben Goldmintz of the Canadian Association of Jewish Seniors.





CJCONT APPLAUDS ARREST IN RYERSON HATE GRAFFITI CASE

Canadian Jewish Congress Ontario Region applauded the arrest earlier this month of Kevin Haas, 21, in connection with hate graffiti and flyers found on the Ryerson University Campus over the last several months.

The graffiti and flyers were aimed at both Jews and Arabs. The series of events began in the summer, when anti-Muslim graffiti was found outside a multi-faith room, and escalated when posters threatening violence against Arab and Muslim students were found on campus. Anti-Jewish graffiti was also found during this period.

"As a community, we are very relieved that an arrest has been made in this case," said CJCONT chair Joel Richler. "We've condemned these acts from the beginning - an attack against one of us is an attack against all of us," he noted.

Haas has been charged with seven counts of mischief and two counts of threatening death. Police plan to ask Attorney General Michael Bryant to proceed with hate-crime charges in this case.

At a press briefing at Ryerson University after the arrest was announced, university president Claude Lajeunesse said the

"dark cloud" hanging over the campus had been lifted. "Rather than divide our campus, it has united our campus," he added.

At the media briefing, CJCONT executive director Bernie M. Farber praised the university, its security staff and police for the arrest.

"Hate propaganda is reprehensible, it doesn't matter who carries it out," he said. "When one student, when one person is targeted simply for who they are... we have to stand together," he added.

Farber noted that the fact that an arrest had been made has brought a "huge sigh of relief" from the Jewish community.

CJCONT, the university and the Canadian Arab Federation made a joint public statement in August denouncing the series of hate crimes.

"As Canadians, we are always saddened by such acts," said Richler. "In this

case, we have always believed that the actions were an attempt to drive a divisive wedge between Jews, Arabs and Muslims. Clearly, that attempt failed."



(L-R): 51 Toronto Police Service 51 Division Superintendent Randal Munroe, CJCONT Executive Director Bernie M. Farber, Canadian Arab Federation National President Omar Alghabra and Ryerson University President Claude Lajeunesse at the press briefing.

The Bay - Walton files human rights complaint (continued from page 1)

"The ability to get or not get a job should never be predicated on religion," said Rudner. He noted the case illustrates the tension between an employer's responsibility to accommodate the religious practices of its employees and its legal protection against suffering undue hardship by accommodating employees.

"These types of situations really require employers and current or prospective employees to be flexible in finding a middle ground where the needs of both parties can be met."

On Walton's behalf, Rudner contacted representatives in the human resources department of Hudson's Bay Company to attempt to mediate the situation, but the two sides were unable to resolve their differences. At that point, Walton filed a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal. "I must confess that I was somewhat surprised when, after conversations with the Bay's HR department, they seemed un-persuaded of their duty to accommodate," he said.

CJCONT will continue to monitor this situation as it unfolds.



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FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM ON ALL FRONTS



Earlier this month, Len Rudner, CJCONT's Director of Community Relations, spoke about the current state of antisemitism in Ontario at the annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews. Below is an abridged version of that speech.

2004 was a unique year.

I cannot recall another month like March, where we saw smashed windows at Jewish schools and synagogues; cemetery tombstones overturned; swastikas and messages of hate drawn on Jewish community signs and on private property. But neither can I recall another day like March 24, when more than 3,000 people from all faiths and walks of life jammed into the Leah Posluns Theatre at the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre and overflowed into the streets to denounce the acts of hate that victimized our community. That day, the victims were gathered into the arms of the larger community, and the perpetrators stood isolated and alone.

A week after that rally, diverse communities had yet another opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity at the Pickering Islamic Centre, a facility victimized by an arson attack. CJCONT had the honour to be one of the many groups invited to speak to a crowd of hundreds of people.

Hate crime statistics gathered by Toronto Police over the past few years suggest that incidents of reported hate crimes have actually decreased. This is all well and good, but what is the impact of hate crimes on the individuals who experience them?

Imagine that you unfold a newspaper to find the picture of a little girl dressed in her *Purim* costume, her eyes burned out with a cigarette. Imagine what it feels like to receive a letter that tells you that "all the Jews are going to die," or a phone call telling you that "Hitler missed a few - I will be more thorough."

Imagine that you live on a quiet street in Thornhill, and one morning, your mother, a Holocaust survivor, opens the front door to find a swastika and the words "Jewz Suk" scrawled there.

The message you would learn is the message that is taught to every community under siege: you are in peril; bad things can happen to you; you do not belong here.

Several months ago, I visited a private girl's school in Brampton to speak about antisemitism. One of the girls asked me a question I had never been asked before. She said, "you must see lots of terrible stuff in your job. What is the hardest thing you've ever had to deal with?" I answered, "When I walked into your school this morning, I just waltzed my way up to the front desk and introduced myself to the receptionist. She pointed me to your class. I cannot help but contrast this easy exchange with what I have to go through to gain access to a Jewish school. Imagine facing locked doors, intercom systems, electronic doors, and interrogations

by a guard in a bulletproof booth – just because you want to go into a school. That is the hardest thing for me." I weep for the lessons that this daily routine teaches our children. And I hate it, with every fibre of my being.

The solution to this problem does not lie solely with police or lawmakers - it lies with each of us in our capacities as parents, peers, educators, clergy and so on. We must teach our children that hatred of the "other" is a cancer that eats away at the fragile threads that bind together the fabric of our civil (and sometimes not so civil) society.

We must work to ensure that equality in the educational, economic and social sense of the word is the order of the day for all our citizens – and in so doing, eliminate the festering discontent that is so often the medium in which hatred grows. We need to stick together - as we did in March, at the Bathurst JCC and the Islamic Centre in Pickering; and as we did in September, when Ryerson University, the Canadian Arab Federation and CJCONT issued a joint press release denouncing the hateful acts of an individual who attempted to drive a wedge between Jews, Arabs and Muslims on campus through graffiti and threats.

When people ask me if 2004 is 1934 all over again, I can say with confidence that it is not. But that is not to say that I don't understand the honest place from where the question springs. I travelled to Poland this summer as part of the advance team for March of the Living 2005. I thought I was ready to visit for the first time a place I had already visited so many times before in my mind and heart. But I was wrong. As I stood on the rail track in Birkenau, I looked behind me, and in the distance I saw the familiar arch through which the trains delivered their human cargo. Closer, I saw the ramp, where the selection was made. To my right was the ruin of one of the gas chambers/crematoria. I looked down and saw that I stood on the very last railroad tie.

I knelt on that simple railroad tie and wept at the realization that this was truly "the end of the line." But more than that, I wept for the realization of how many thousands of railroad ties were necessary to bring the victims of hate to this precise spot. Each of those ties represented a decision. A choice. An opportunity missed or miscalculated. It didn't have to end there. But it did.

If you look down now, at your feet, you can imagine that each of us stands on a railroad tie located somewhere on the road from "back there" to "up there ahead." We have a choice. We need to stick together.

Sharing a story of survival

Earlier this month, more than 200 members of the community came together at Forest Hill Place Retirement Home to hear Bernie Farber share the story of his father's escape from the Nazis in Poland, and what that has meant for the Farber family.

