



"Creating partnerships for global peace, security and development"

Religious differences set aside for peace project

Canada's largest Somali and Jewish community organizations chose a local high school with one of the city's largest Somali student populations as the setting for a 'groundbreaking' announcement this week.

The Jewish-Somali Project, a joint partnership between the Canadian Somali Congress (CSC), the United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto (UJA), the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and the Canadian International Peace Project, will pair established Jewish professionals with young Somali university students to provide mentoring.

"Many Canadians might be surprised the Muslim and Jewish communities are coming together for this project, because often when we talk about the issues, sadly it becomes political, which only leads to strife," Bernie Farber, CEO of the CJC, said at the launch at Kipling Collegiate on Tuesday. "But today, with the Canadian Somali Congress and the Canadian Jewish Congress, the stress is on the 'Canadian' part of our names... Together, we are trying to forge a path and make a statement we haven't been able to make before. This is more than just a dialogue."

"This project is a microcosm of Canadian values. It's very Canadian, very appropriate and very urgent," added Howard English, VP Corporate Communications for UJA.

As a relatively new immigrant community, Canadian Somalis, like Jewish Canadians in years past, have been undergoing a number of growing pains as they adjust to life in Canada, said Mark Persaud, president of CIPP.

"Being poor, black and Muslim only adds to those challenges," he said, noting the necessity of developing a cadre of Canadian Somali professionals to aid in the integration process.

To address the issue, the CSC invited other Canadian communities to assist Canadian Somalis in their efforts to successfully integrate into Canadian society, and the Jewish community responded to that call, Persaud said.

"Canadian multicultural policies and practices have traditionally focused on individual communities being accepted and respected in Canada. The Jewish-Somali Project presents a paradigm shift in our approach to multiculturalism wherein two very different and diverse groups are working together to assist in building stronger communities," he said of the project, which will start in Toronto, then branch out nationally, to Ottawa first, then Edmonton, then beyond.



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It's a project all sponsoring organizations hope will be held up as an ideal.

"We hope this type of mutual understanding is adopted in abundance by other communities. This project is an example of what is possible in a country like Canada," said CSC's Digal Hiao.

"Today, we bring together the Muslim and Jewish communities in the Canadian context. We're not here as Muslims, we're not here as Jews. We're here as Canadians, and that's incredibly important," added James Morton, governor of the CIPP.

Source: Cynthia Reason, Etobicoke Guardian, published October 28, 2008