

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honourable Anita Anand, P.C., M.P., Minister of National Defence

CC: Major-General (Ret'd) E.S. (Ed) Fitch, OMM, MSM, CD, Member of the Advisory Panel
Captain (Ret'd) D.L. (Door) Gibson, MMM, CD, Member of the Advisory Panel
Sergeant (Ret'd) Aronhia:nens Derek Montour, Member of the Advisory Panel
Major (Ret'd) Sandra Perron, CD, BA, MSc, Member of the Advisory Panel
Bill Matthews, Deputy Minister of National Defence
General Wayne Eyre, CMM, MSC, CD, Chief of the Defence Staff
The Honourable Kerry-Lynne Findlay, P.C., Q.C., Shadow Minister for National Defence, MP South
Surrey—White Rock

FROM: Michael van Pelt, President & CEO, Cardus
Rev. Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett, Director, Religious Freedom and Faith Community Engagement, Cardus
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DATE: April 29, 2022

SUBJECT: Radically Detrimental Recommendations Regarding Chaplaincy in The Canadian Armed Forces

WHO WE ARE

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

ISSUE

On April 25, 2022 the final report of the Minister of National Defence's Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination was presented. The overall goals of this panel – to provide recommendations on how to eliminate systemic racism and discrimination from the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF) – are commendable. However, the panel's [Recommendation 6 – “Re-Defining Chaplaincy”](#) is extremely troubling and overtly discriminatory against certain religions. This explicitly prejudiced recommendation undermines the panel's very purpose: to address discrimination in DND and the CAF.

POSITION

The report states, “[S]ome chaplains represent or are affiliated with organized religions whose beliefs are not synonymous with those of a diverse and inclusive workplace. Some of the affiliated religions of these chaplains do not subscribe to an open attitude and the promotion of diversity. For example, some churches' exclusion of women from their priesthoods violates principles of equality and social justice, as do sexist notions embedded in their religious dogmas. In addition, certain faiths have strict tenets requiring conversion of those they deem to be “pagan,” or who belong to polytheistic religions.”

- **Cardus Response:** This commentary demonstrates thinly veiled hostility to a number of Abrahamic religions including adherents of Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. It shows gross ignorance of the teachings of these faiths and presents caricatures of their adherents as

violators of equality and social justice. This defamatory language goes so far as to equate adherents of monotheistic religions with racism. In a constitutional democracy, it is wholly outside the scope of the state to make judgements on the truth claims of any religion or the attitudes of their adherents.

The report states, “If the Defence Team rejects gender discrimination, anti-Indigenous discrimination, and racialized discrimination in every other area and is working hard to remove systemic barriers to the employment of marginalized people, it cannot justify hiring representatives of organizations who marginalize certain people or categorically refuse them a position of leadership.”

- **Cardus Response:** This commentary is a clear violation of section 2 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that protects freedom of conscience and religion, and freedom of association. It argues that the state, through its hiring practices, should effectively police the legitimacy of Canadians’ most deeply held beliefs and how those are lived out in community with others.

The report states, “The Advisory Panel has observed that there are varying degrees of misogyny, sexism and discrimination woven into the philosophies and beliefs of some mainstream religions currently represented in the cadre of chaplains in the CAF.”

- **Cardus Response:** Combined with previous sections, this attack on the “philosophies and beliefs” of particular religions is deeply troubling. It displays a deep ignorance and unfounded prejudice of various religious traditions. The state’s role is to ensure that all religious communities are protected from this kind of intrusion, not to engage in such intrusion themselves.

The report states, “This Advisory Panel does not seek to evaluate or categorize these religions in this report. Rather it is pointing out that the Defence Team cannot consider itself supportive of inclusivity when it employs as chaplains members of organizations whose values are not consistent with National Defence’s ethics and values—even if those members express non-adherence to the policies of their chosen religion.”

- **Cardus Response:** It is incoherent for the Panel to suggest that it “does not seek to evaluate or categorize these religions” when the preceding paragraphs have done just that. The panel’s narrow reading of inclusivity fails to understand that in a pluralist democracy, everyone is free to adhere or not adhere to a religious faith. Chaplains are employed to provide meaningful pastoral care to all CAF members, both from their own faith community and others needing pastoral care. This is reflective of the deep pluralism of Canadian society. We agree with sub-recommendation 6.2 to “select chaplains representative of many faiths including forms of spirituality beyond the Abrahamic faiths.” The government should expand rather than limit the number of chaplains within the CAF to ensure the full plurality of faiths are represented.

The report recommends, “6.1 Do not consider for employment as spiritual guides or multi-faith representatives Chaplaincy applicants affiliated with religious groups whose values are not aligned with those of the Defence Team. The Defence Team’s message, otherwise, is inconsistent.”

- **Cardus Response:** Minister Anand has recently highlighted the [need](#) to recruit more personnel to the CAF. “We’ve got to make sure that members of the Canadian public who are deciding how they’re going to spend their lives see the Canadian Armed Forces as a viable option for them,” she said. “We have to have institutions where all Canadians see themselves as playing a part and that means having institutions where discrimination and sexual harassment and other forms of unfair treatment are not present.” In 2019, Statistics Canada [found](#) that over 65% of Canadians over the age of 15 adhere to Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. This report undermines the Minister’s own recruitment message by telling millions of Canadians that they need not apply because of their religious beliefs.

RECOMMENDATION

During the April 25, 2022 press conference, Minister Anand noted that “exclusionary practices are degrading, demeaning, and violate the dignity that everyone deserves, regardless of where they work.” We wholeheartedly agree. As such, we recommend that the Minister firmly and publicly reject the discriminatory sections of the report’s Recommendation 6 – “Re-Defining Chaplaincy.” Further, the Minister should affirm that all Canadians, including those with religious beliefs, will be supported through the pastoral services of CAF chaplains as they serve our country.

The working group formed to implement these recommendations should ensure they engage broadly with faith communities both within and outside DND and the CAF to ensure that meaningful inclusion is not undermined as a consequence of Recommendation 6. Rather the spirit of sub-recommendation 6.2 to “select chaplains representative of many faiths including forms of spirituality beyond the Abrahamic faiths” should be embraced and expanded. This should be done in a manner that is not punitive towards Abrahamic faiths whose freedom to profess their faith is equally protected in our free and democratic society.

CONTACT

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and be of assistance in any considerations on this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us at mvanpelt@cardus.ca.