



# Opposition MPs accuse Harper government of damaging fight against anti-Semitism

Norma Greenaway, Canwest News Service: Monday, February 8, 2010

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney was the target of verbal fire from opposition MPs.

**Photo Credit:** Blair Gable, Reuters

OTTAWA — The Harper government is damaging efforts to combat anti-Semitism by turning it into a partisan issue, opposition MPs charged Monday at a special parliamentary inquiry.

The target of their verbal fire was Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, who was appearing before the all-party inquiry by senators and MPs into anti-Semitism in Canada.

Liberal and New Democrat MPs said the government had soured the environment by sending and defending a taxpayer funded mail-out in November — featuring pictures of Prime Minister Stephen Harper — that criticized Liberals for sending "confusing messages" about defending Israel and fighting terrorism and suggesting the Liberal party is anti-Semitic.

Liberal MP Anita Neville, who is Jewish, suggested the Conservatives were guilty of "incitement to anti-Semitism" with a "horrendous flyer" that, she argued, fuels divisiveness.

New Democrat Judy Wasylycia-Leis said the Tory attempt to paint Liberal MPs as anti-Semitic, as well as the "ill-founded" decision to cut funding to KAIROS, a mainstream Christian religious organization, are a "setback" in the quest to keep partisanship out of the fight against anti-Semitic hatred.

Kenney was unapologetic about the flyer, and assured the inquiry he doesn't believe any member of the House of Commons is anti-Semitic.

He also defended the funding cut to KAIROS, saying the group doesn't deserve government money because it advocates the boycott of the Jewish state, including disinvestment and sanctions, charges denied by the group's defenders.

Kenney added, however, the KAIROS decision had nothing to do with his take on the group's anti-Israel positions. The call was made solely by the Canadian International Development Agency on grounds it wanted to focus on food security and fighting poverty, he said.

Kenney said he would continue to target groups deemed as terrorist or that use anti-Semitic language.

"We are going to name them, and if that ruffles feathers, so be it," he said, citing the decision to cut funding to the Canadian Arab Federation as an example.

Neville, a Winnipeg MP, said later she is angry about the Tories' tactics.

"What they are doing sows divisiveness," she said in an interview. "I think they are not helping the Jewish community by setting them up against other groups. I am hearing from people in my community, non-Jewish people, who say, 'I am a strong supporter of Israel but I don't like what's happening on these other issues.' "

Speaking later to reporters, Kenney said he is not "aware" of any governmentwide effort to cut funding to groups that are critical of Israel.

But he said, "I took the position in my own ministry that we're not going to fund organizations that promote hatred or apologize for terrorism. And that doesn't just apply to groups in the Middle East. It's a general principle, and I think it's a sensible one."

The inquiry aims to issue a report sometime this spring.

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