

**Presentation by the  
Chair of the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security at the  
Second Public-Private Sector Summit on National Security  
Ottawa - May 9, 2006**

Title:  
*“The Cross-Cultural Aspects of Security”*

Panel: New ideas and innovations in national security

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, which I have had the pleasure of chairing since its inception in February 2005.

**1. Creation of the CCRS – An inclusive and multicultural model**

The Government stated, at that time, that it created the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security to pursue its commitment to include all Canadians in the ongoing building and protection of this country and to ensure that its approach to security is effective.

It brought us together, 15 individuals, all volunteers, from diverse ethno-cultural and religions communities from across the country. While we may come from different backgrounds and different cultures, it is our commitment to human rights, to strong and safe communities, and to protecting Canada and Canadians from harm, that unites us as a Roundtable. The diversity within our membership and the spectrum of opinions reflects the diversity and concerns of Canada’s citizens. The Roundtable is part of a pluralistic process of consultation, collaboration, and learning.

When creating the Roundtable, the federal government could have chosen a different model, such as those created in Europe and Australia, focusing solely on the Muslim community, but instead, it made a very strong commitment to reject the stigmatization of any one community. Moreover, it has gone to great lengths to ensure equality and mutual respect amongst our communities. Since the Roundtable’s inception, initiatives, such as the Canada Border Service Agency’s Fairness Initiative and the RCMP’s Bias-Free Policing Policy, have signaled the commitment of federal agencies to ensure that the Canadian values enshrined in our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* are reflected in the way government officials perform their everyday duties.

## **2. Rationale for its creation, mandate and work to date**

The very creation of our Roundtable, consisting of a membership with strong foundations in our ethno-cultural and religious communities, reflects a genuine desire by the government to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the broader community. I believe it also reflects a recognition that security concerns within our multicultural communities, can potentially be divisive and create unease in different segments of our society, causing some to feel more vulnerable than others.

We were given a mandate by the government to engage in a long-term dialogue in order to improve understanding on how to manage security interests in a diverse society, and to promote the protection of civil order, mutual respect, and common understanding. Most importantly, we have reached out to Canada's diverse communities and listened to their fears, their aspirations, how security measures are perceived within their communities, and how they believe they are impacted by such measures. We try to bring these perspectives to the table and inform our government representatives of these concerns. We wish to give a voice to those who feel voiceless, and to contribute to a greater understanding through the exchange of information between the government and communities at large.

### Work to date

The agenda we adopted for 2005/06 covered many diverse facets of national security concerns and brought many new perspectives to the understanding, by all participants (members, Ministers and officials), of important security issues and the impact of national security measures on Canadians. Our first year allowed us to really appreciate the multicultural nature of the Roundtable as we did not shy away from discussing difficult issues regarding national security that often involved debates around foreign policy and religious issues. All members found these discussions informative, enhancing our understanding of other communities' concerns and issues, as well as practical measures to address these concerns.

In our formal meetings, we have discussed pertinent issues relating to national security with senior government officials and Ministers. Many of the members have been and continue to be active within their respective ethno-cultural and religious communities and provided their perspectives to the security agencies regarding practical aspects of training and recruitment measures, border services and activities, and security investigations. These perspectives were provided from a "citizen's lens" enhanced by cultural awareness and sensitivity. Our dialogue with government officials resulted in the current development, by the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, with the assistance of the Portfolio agencies, of a booklet on national security. The booklet explains the roles and responsibilities of the security agencies and the

complaints mechanisms and will be particularly helpful to new Canadians who might be more likely to interact with these agencies as they proceed through the immigration process.

We have facilitated numerous meetings between government and local community groups to ensure that a two-way dialogue takes place - explaining what security measures have been enacted, why, and what is being done to protect all Canadians. Equally important has been the information exchange, the listening to those who may feel there is a disproportionate impact on them from some of these measures.

Based on our feedback, security agencies are re-assessing how they should interact with diverse communities with a long-term view to establishing sustained and effective relationships. More broadly, federal government departments, including Justice and Public Safety, are also re-examining how they engage in outreach activities to Canadians on national security issues. Through our outreach, we have recognized the need to build trust and understanding among our diverse communities and the security agencies, toward the common goal of enhanced security.

### **3. Work plan for next year with focus on outreach activities**

As we move forward into 2006, we have collectively identified our priorities. Through a proposed series of community outreach activities, locally, regionally and nationally, we are focused on achieving strategic results in four main areas.

Firstly, beyond the government's efforts to protect its citizens, our overall security depends on the responsibility and attitude of all Canadians, and their desire and ability to work together to protect our communities. We need to develop and reinforce the concept of responsible citizens, and underline the responsibilities associated with being part of Canadian society, including the necessary commitment to the security of, and within our communities. We wish to advise government on the potential role and responsibilities of all members of Canadian society, including youth, in the security of Canada. This would also include how the government itself could support its people in this role and relationship.

Secondly, the London bombings which took place in July 2005 have led some of us to think very differently about security issues. Disturbing to us all was the notion of second or third generation Canadians, born in an open and democratic country, adopting violent solutions such as suicide bombings as a means of protesting government actions. There is no reason to believe that Canadians are immune from the conditions that led to these events. This is not an issue unique to the UK. We therefore need to better understand these concerns domestically and dialogue with communities about understanding the conditions that could potentially lead to the adoption of extremist views and the commitment of terrorist acts or hate crimes by Canadians, particularly youth, at home or abroad. We also

need to discuss potential effective interventions to prevent such tragedies from occurring within our borders.

Thirdly, we will continue to facilitate a two-way communication regarding the implementation of Canadian government security measures, and their impact on ethno-cultural communities; and individual members, as best they can, will carry on promoting inter-cultural dialogue within their respective communities on local issues and concerns related to national security.

Fourth, and last, in the event of a terrorist act in Canada or directed against Canadians, we need to be concerned with the possibility and even likelihood of community backlash and hate crimes against ethno-cultural members of our communities. By talking with communities, strategies to deal with this scenario could be examined and developed. These would aim to strengthen community relations and mobilize ethno-cultural and interfaith organizations, cultural businesses and youth groups, in an effort to mitigate the fallouts of a terrorist attack in Canada.

#### **4. Advantages of the CCRS model**

Many countries, including those who have experienced first hand the devastation of terrorist activities, are vigorously pursuing mechanisms to address the challenges of an ever-changing threat environment.

The Canadian government recognized that a key challenge was how to explain and consult with members of society on national security policies. Being a country with a strong sense of multiculturalism, we have developed, and continue to build, a solid capacity for dialogue and self-expression in diverse communities. Our longstanding experience with bridging cultural, linguistic, religious, and regional divides has resulted in great successes in intercultural exchanges. While not perfect, multiculturalism is recognized internationally as a defining feature of Canada. This is the premise on which the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security came into being, by reflecting a balanced approach between the needs of our diverse communities, and ensuring the safety and security of all Canadians.

In today's complex security environment, intelligence and law enforcement agencies must work with community groups to be effective. My colleagues and I have come to realize that dialogue, mutual accommodation and connecting across differences are also necessary in the rest of the world.

Within a multicultural country such as Canada, each of us brings something unique to the discussion - a unique perspective, our own experiences. And those of the diverse Canadian communities we come from. Concerns about security measures do not come from just one community or one religion. The Roundtable, either through the rotation of new members or through its outreach activities will seek out as many of these perspectives as possible. While we do not expect to see large-scale policy or program changes as a result of our work,

we are satisfied that any and all impacts of our dialogue will help move Canada forward.

## **5. Conclusion**

Canada has always built on the strength and contributions of the people that make up its communities, whether its native and founding peoples, or its many generations of immigrants. It has never feared to be first to promote and support peaceful relations both within and outside its borders. I would suggest to you that the Roundtable represents both an innovative and an important contribution in this national security imperative.