

Testimony of the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector

March 18 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chair and Honourable Members of the Committee;

I greet you all with the Islamic greeting: Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahu Wa Barakatahu - May Peace, Mercy and Blessings of God be upon you all.

My name is Haseen Khan. I am a Water Resources Engineer by profession and currently working as Director of the Water Resources Management Division, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's. I am also the Treasurer of MANAL, the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador. MANAL is a religious charitable non-profit organization. It was registered with the Canadian Revenue Agency in 1982. Since the construction of the first Mosque in NL in 1990 by MANAL, the Association and the Mosque are managed by volunteers who have their own professional careers. The Association has no full-time or part-time paid employees. I am one of many of the Association's volunteers. I have participated in various activities of the Association for the last 29 years.

Mr. Chair, MANAL is engaged in religious, educational, social and outreach activities. It also maintains close relationship with other faith groups. Our mission is to contribute to the well-being of the Muslim community in Newfoundland and Labrador, the larger community of our province and our fellow Canadians by providing spiritual, financial, social and other support to those in need especially those who face poverty and destitute situations. Annual donation by members is the sole source of Association's income.

The Muslim population in Newfoundland and Labrador is over 2000 people. We had a recent boost in our population with the arrival of around 200 Syrian refugees.

Mr. Chair, MANAL would like to thank members of the Committee on Charitable Sector for the opportunity to share its experience and views in this area.

I am going to share our experience in three areas. The first relates to the role of religion in the development of individuals, society and the nation. The second relates to volunteering and its benefits to society. The third and the last examines challenges experienced by the sector. Our approach to contribute to the development of healthy and sustainable communities is from the perspective of a religious charitable organization. I am sure there are many non-religious organizations and individuals who are contributing in their own ways to the well-being of the society.

Mr. Chair, I will conclude my brief by summarizing challenges faced by the sector and recommendations to address these challenges.

Mr. Chair, Religion provides many tangible and non-tangible benefits to individuals as well as to the society. Religion acts as an anchor. It teaches its adherents to adopt a holistic approach to life. It covers all aspects of human life such as character, work and family. It defines boundaries to differentiate between what is lawful and what is unlawful, and reminds us about the concept of accountability. One is always reminded by the percept of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. It commands us to promote and practice justice, equality, and tolerance. We believe that adherence to religious values refines one's personality and character; instills the feeling of self-confidence and contentment; inculcates humility and compassion in one's behaviour; and provides ultimate happiness of body, mind and soul.

Ultimately, religion helps to produce good citizens with strong moral and ethical values. Religion reminds us that life is a journey. It is a journey of choices, changes, challenges, accomplishments and failures. Religion does not eliminate tough challenges of life but provides us a toolbox to navigate through rough patches of life. This toolbox include patience, gratitude and trust.

MANAL promotes adherence to religious values through its Friday sermons, youth club and Sunday school programs. MANAL, based on its 30 years of charitable and volunteer experience, feels that religion is a mechanism that transforms belief and values into habits and practices which play a critical role in building healthy communities. Healthy communities contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the country through public engagement, increased economic output, social well-being, and reduced health care cost.

I will now move to the second item of my brief that relates to volunteering and its benefits to the society.

Mr. Chair, Volunteering refers to the efforts of willing individuals to engage in activities that contribute to the betterment of other individuals, communities, society and the nation. It is the best model of giving and sharing for the purpose of solidarity, social inclusion and building healthy and sustainable communities. Volunteers invest their wealth, time, knowledge and skillsets to something or someone other than themselves.

Volunteering is an important part of the identity of the human beings. In a sense, the Prophets and Messengers of God and reformers were volunteers. The former two had two statements to make to the people: I invite you to worship the Lord, your Creator; and I do not ask you for a reward for my efforts to guide you to the true religion. Through that selfless call to God, they

showed us that the most important task a human being has ever done in this world was done by volunteers. Reformers were also volunteers for their causes.

Mr. Chair, Giving and sharing is an integral part of Islam. Muslims are obligated to pay 2.5% of their annual savings, commonly known as Zakat, to cater to the needs of the less fortunate members of the family and the community. The Association collects Zakat money from its members on a regular basis and disburse it to the needy members of the community.

In the context of volunteering, social scientists have reported that success in life is not measured by what you accomplish for yourself but by the impact you had on the lives of others.

I come from Newfoundland and Labrador. My fellow Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans have a reputation for being caring, kind, giving, selfless and community oriented people. Their spirit of giving and caring has lead to a strong, stable and social network among rural communities of the province, and the strengthening of Canada's social fabric.

Our weather in Newfoundland and Labrador can be harsh but we are blessed with a sharing and caring human climate. The great human volunteering qualities of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans are best documented through the most recent Broadway Musical – Come From Away. In brief, it is the story of a small community that welcomed passengers of 9/11 flights diverted to rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, MANAL was established on the principle of volunteering. Volunteers manage each activity of MANAL. Beside MANAL activities, our volunteers also participate in other community building activities such as settlement of new refugees, poverty reduction, inter-faith collaboration, and opening our doors for visits by school children. We undertake these

activities in partnership with other faith groups and non-profit groups. Based on our experience, we are of the opinion that volunteering is highly beneficial to volunteers than the sector they serve as it provides social and intellectual stimulation. The research findings show a significant relationship between volunteering and good health, greater longevity, higher level of happiness, higher functional ability and lower rates of depression (CNN, May 16, 2016).

Mr. Chair, I have summarized religious, social and volunteer activities conducted through our organization. This is only possible because as a charitable organization we are able to provide a platform and infrastructure such as Mosque premises, financial resources and volunteers to undertake activities as outlined earlier. In closing, I would like to outline key challenges faced by the charitable and volunteer sectors and recommendations to address these.

Challenges and Recommendations:

1. Declining Congregation and Revenue – According to CBC story of March 10, 2019 due to declining congregation and associated decline in revenue, about 9,000 of total 27,000 religious spaces will be lost in the next decade in Canada. This loss of facilities will have adverse impact on smaller communities in rural Canada.

This leads me to reflect on the revenue base of charitable organizations that is generally through donations by congregation members. The only financial incentive to our donors is the tax credit they receive from Canadian Revenue Agency. The Committee should consider recommending increase in tax credit for charitable donations as it would improve members' willingness to donate, and improve revenue base of the sector.

2. Supply-Demand Imbalance – There is a growing demand of spiritual, social, and financial support by the society especially the poverty-stricken and destitute individuals while the fiscal and human resource base of charitable organization is shrinking.

In addition to the recommendation of tax credit increase under item #1, the Committee should consider recommending that the federal and provincial government and charitable organizations collaborate to develop programs with appropriate incentives to promote and encourage volunteerism by all segments of the society. This might address human resources issues.

Many government programs directed at new Canadians, refugees and others could also be delivered by charitable organizations. The committee may consider recommending the role of the sector in this area.

3. Infrastructure – Majority of charitable institutions were built in early 50s and 60s and are in need of major renovations.

The committee should recommend that charitable institutions should be allowed to avail federal infrastructure programs on a coast-shared basis to build and renovate charitable institution facilities.

4. Collaboration and Partnership – The current Canada Revenue Agency policy does not allow charities to launch joint collaborative programs as each charity is required to undertake its own activities.

The Committee should consider recommending that charities be allowed to launch joint collaborative programs for the benefit of the society, as collaborative programs will result in cost efficiencies and improvement in service delivery. Public, private and volunteer sectors are the pillars of the Canadian society. The Committee should

recommend that these three pillars of the society should explore collaborative framework especially in the area of social service delivery.

As a final closing comment, MANAL recommends that the Committee reaffirm in its report that charitable and volunteer sectors play an important role in producing good citizens and building healthy and sustainable communities, and their work and contribution should be recognized and supported through appropriate policies. MANAL hopes that the work of the Honourable Committee members will lead to the development of a stronger and productive charitable and non-profit volunteer sectors in Canada. Thank you.