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The Centre for Inquiry Ontario is a non-profit think-tank, and educational organization, promoting science, reason, free inquiry and free expression in all areas of human endeavor. We are deeply concerned that the current publicly funded system, by limiting admission of pupils and educators to practicing Catholics and those who share the same world view, effectively stifles a student's ability to enquire and express themselves openly.

The Centre for Inquiry Ontario seeks the elimination of religious discrimination and costly duplication in the Ontario school system through the establishment of a single, secular, publicly funded school system for each official language. The Centre for Inquiry calls upon the Government of Ontario to uphold its obligations under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and various international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by withdrawing public funding for all sectarian religious schools. The establishment of one public school system is the only truly fair, multicultural and economic solution.

It is the position of the Centre for Inquiry Ontario that the laws governing Ontario's public schools must be religiously neutral –that is, government funding should not go to privilege one religion over another, nor the religious over the non-religious. We feel that religion must be taught in the context of educating, not indoctrinating, in the form of a common world religions class.

The so-called constitutional guarantee of the status quo is illusory. The Constitution gives the provinces absolute power over education with one provision for federal oversight – s. 93(4) - a mandated process for change which guards against frivolous or premature abrogation of privileges granted at an earlier time for a reason that no longer exists.

It is the position of the Centre for Inquiry Ontario that providing public funding to every religious denomination is not the solution. It would be equally unrealistic for a government to choose which deserve funding and which do not, as this would force our elected officials to define what constitutes a religion. The provinces of Newfoundland and Quebec have both added Constitutional Amendments to recue themselves from using public funds to finance discriminatory religious schools. The province of Newfoundland attempted to fund an education system for eight religious denominations, resulting in 1266 schools in 270 school boards. During a referendum in early 1997, nearly 73 percent of Newfoundlanders, including a majority of Roman Catholics, voted to end church controlled education that had existed for nearly 165 years.

The position of John Tory's Conservatives, to segment our society along religious grounds, is a pseudo solution. The beauty of a multicultural society is that individuals, regardless of background, work and live together. If we wish to raise future generations with a tolerant and informed outlook, children must learn and live together from the earliest age, rather than being educated in an isolated system, then thrust into a multicultural work environment. Furthermore, the Liberal government has gone on record testifying that funding more religious school boards would necessitate closing and reducing services in our already underfunded public schools.

The Centre for Inquiry Ontario views the two Canadian violations of the United Nations Covenant, based on the abuse of human rights for publicly funding Roman Catholic schools, as a scar on our history and one that has harmed us on the international stage. Since no action to resolve the violation was taken by either the Canadian or Ontario governments in the almost eight years since the decision, another submission has been filed to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. The United Nations Covenant, of which we are in violation of, was used as a model for our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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