

For Immediate Release
No Religious Arbitration Coalition Congratulates Dalton McGuinty

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The No religious Arbitration Coalition –a coalition of about 100 women’s groups, umbrella organizations and unions that came together to fight proposed reforms to the Arbitration Act because they would obscure the separation of Church and State—is heartened that its message got through.

“We have always maintained that the issue was not one of Muslim or Sharia Law, but of all faith-based arbitration that by-passed the public system of family law in Ontario”, says Coalition Co-Chair, Alia Hogben. “We’re thrilled that our arguments were understood”.

“This is a matter of great import and difficulty for the Province. We appreciate the Premier’s decisiveness in the matter. We have never had an objection to people going to their religious leaders for guidance, but we did not want the laws of the state to intrude in these matters. Today we have affirmed one universal transparent set of rules for all”, says Hogben, whose organization the Canadian Council of Muslim Women has long fought the battle against religious uses of the Arbitration Act.

On Saturday, the No Religious Arbitration Coalition published an open letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty signed by ten prominent Canadians, accusing McGuinty of holding the cornerstone of liberal democratic principles –the separation of state and religious matters- in the balance of his decision. Hot on the heels of international protests, a letter-writing campaign, lobbying and public debate, the Coalition understands that this will require continued dialogue and community-building.

“The last thing in the world we want is for Ontarians of faith to feel we do not respect their rights. On the contrary, we know that religious principles can guide our lives in a multitude of ways, but they must not supplant the public laws that guarantee equality for all”, added Co-Chair Pamela Cross.

Cross, a long-time lawyer in the area of women’s rights and family law, says the Coalition was also concerned that of most of feminism’s successes in securing the equality rights of women have been part of the Family Law Act of Ontario, and that these rights were under attack by the proposed amendments to Ontario’s *Arbitration Act*.

The Premier’s statement is an important first step. Having made the promise to end religious arbitration in family law the Coalition will work closely with others to ensure that the Premier’s promise is enshrined in legislation.

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http://ywcatoronto.org/get_involved/arbitration_intro.htm