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The Strategic Counsel

**A Report to  
The Mosaic Institute**

**Findings of Focus Groups: Communities  
in Conflict (Hindu/Sikh; Sri Lankan  
Tamils/Sinhalese; Jews/Arabs)**

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## I. Introduction



## Introduction

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### A. Background and Methodology

As part of a larger study being undertaken for the Mosaic Institute that looks into the effect of global conflicts on the lives and experiences of diaspora Canadians, *The Strategic Counsel* undertook twelve focus groups with Canadians or Canadian residents of six different ethno-cultural groups originating from regions in conflict. The focus groups were all held in the GTA during the weeks of March 18 and 25, 2013 and were conducted in formal focus group facilities with 7 to 9 participants in each session.

More specifically, the research was conducted among:

- Sikhs and Hindus (2 groups of each) held in Brampton
- Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese (2 groups of each) held in Scarborough
- Jews and Arabs (2 groups of each) held in downtown Toronto

Participants for each of the groups were recruited through our professional recruitment partner TRN, using existing databases, supplemented by some tailored lists and, in a small number of cases, by a “snowball” approach where qualified participants recommend other potential candidates. (For more detailed information on the recruitment methods, see Appendix A). In each group, participants represented a mix of age groups and gender. In addition, each session included participants who were immigrants to Canada from the conflict region OR those with roots in or ties to the conflict region, but born in Canada.

Given the nature of qualitative research, it should not be assumed that focus group participants are not necessarily representative of the groups for which they have been recruited. While all participants were carefully and rigorously recruited to ensure that they met the established criteria for participation, findings from small groups of participants must be considered directional. In other words, the strength and scope of individual’s opinions expressed in these groups may not accurately reflect the distribution and diversity of perspectives in the wider Canadian public.

Further, all sessions were conducted in English only. All participants for all sessions were recruited on the basis of at least some fluency in English. As a result, otherwise qualified potential participants from the six groups would not have been considered for recruitment. This may affect the representativeness of the focus groups.

Each group discussion followed the same loosely-structured moderator’s guide, covering a series of core questions regarding the group members’ perceptions of the conflict in question, their relationship to and views of those on the other side of the conflict, their assessment of relations between representatives from



different sides of each conflict here in Canada, and their views of the actual and potential roles of dialogue and government-led initiatives in addressing any issues between both sides in the conflict.

These focus groups were convened as a complement to a large quantitative study and a series of one-on-one interviews among members of communities in Canada who have personal connections to one of eight (8) entrenched regional conflicts around the world<sup>1</sup>. Like all qualitative research, the findings from these groups are based on very small sample sizes, so are *directional* in nature only, but they provide insights into the nuances of community views and dynamics involved in discussing the conflicts. Moreover, they illustrate how issues are talked about in a more public setting and, as such, might be more censored than in the one-on-one interviews conducted as part of the larger initiative, which afford more anonymity. It is likely that social context has an impact on what people may or may not reveal when speaking in a group – even, or perhaps especially, one made up of their own community members.

## B. Objectives

A number of objectives guided the development of the research, including:

1. To explore the extent to which representatives of different “sides” of entrenched conflicts overseas consider those same conflicts to be a source of tension between their communities in Canada, and identify differences in perceptions about the conflicts from the two sides.
2. To determine if there is any sense that conflicts between sides are hardening or changing among either side in Canada;
3. To explore what might ameliorate any on-going conflict in Canada OR improve relationships between communities on either side of the conflict (e.g., dialogues, government-led initiatives and consultations, educational activities).
4. To assess how residency/citizenship in Canada has influenced perceptions of the conflict (i.e., Do those from each side of the conflict view the conflict differently after living in Canada? What influences these differences [e.g., greater objectivity; more/less balanced media coverage; the sense that Canada is an example of diverse communities living together; government positions; etc.]?)
5. To determine whether government is seen to have a role to play in resolving conflicts between communities here in Canada AND/OR in the countries from which the conflicts originate.

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<sup>1</sup> Conflicts examined include: Israel/Palestine; Armenia/Turkey; Sri Lanka; Somalia and Horn of Africa; the Sudans; India/Pakistan (including Sikhs and non-Sikhs in the Punjab); Afghanistan; the former Yugoslavia.



## II. Key Findings



## Key Findings

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1. There were distinct differences across the three sets of conflict groups when it came to the degree of conflict and animosity that participants described between their communities:
  - a. Sikhs and Hindus were definitely at the moderate end, downplaying their conflict and showing a strong desire to move on and maintain the strong bonds of friendship that have traditionally existed between them, both in India and here in Canada.
  - b. For Tamils and Sinhalese with connections to Sri Lanka the conflict came across as much more intense, and they seemed to share little sense of belonging to the same community, whether here or in Sri Lanka. Instead, real acrimony appears to exist as a result of the 30-year civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). While Sinhalese participants were of the view that the conflict is over and it is now time to move on, participants in the Tamil sessions were adamant that the conflict and issues that led to the civil war in the first place have yet to be resolved, despite the formal defeat of the LTTE by government forces in 2009.
  - c. Among Jews and Arabs, there was little contact and even less understanding between the two communities. Arab participants described the conflict as primarily about politics and power and the perpetuation of what they perceive to be an egregious social injustice against the Palestinians. Jewish participants, on the other hand, spoke principally about the survival of Israel and the Jewish people, and placed the current conflict within the broader narrative of centuries of anti-Semitism and persecution. Notably, while those in the Arab groups were careful to draw distinctions between their feelings towards Jewish people and the state of Israel, those in the Jewish groups made several dehumanizing and derogatory and even dehumanizing comments about Arabs and Muslims, suggesting a significant divide between the two communities.
2. For most of these groups the conflict affecting their respective communities was seen as largely political, and more about governments, politicians, power and greed than about the people themselves; however, each conflict clearly also has some ethnic and/or religious overlay.
3. Regardless of the group, there were participants on both sides of each conflict who felt that the media is either biased against them or favours the other side, both in their home countries and in the West, including Canada.
4. For Hindus/Sikhs and Tamils/Sinhalese, there are aspects of each conflict that were perceived to be more of an issue here and/or among the diaspora than in the home countries.





5. Across all the groups most were only somewhat receptive to the idea of dialogue, either for fear of raising tensions, because they wanted to move beyond the past, or because they felt there is no point.
6. Most, however, were supportive of the role of education and the general idea of increasing mutual understanding and acceptance among their communities here in Canada.
7. Overall, most see Canada as a place to transcend their differences and get along as Canadians embracing Canadian values of tolerance and freedom, which is made all the more possible by the security of living in a peaceful country.
8. There was mixed reaction to the idea of Canadian government involvement in affairs abroad. Most do not see Canada as having much influence/power to affect decisions and events, and most feel that the issues and politics in their home countries are not the business of outsiders or are simply too complicated and difficult to navigate.
9. When it comes to government action in Canada, there was some desire among the Jewish participants for government to curb Arab immigration and influence, while both Hindu and Sinhalese participants suggested that the Canadian government should monitor and/or police activities of the 'other side' of their respective conflicts– i.e., Sikhs and Tamils – as a guard against radicalism or fundamentalism gaining a foothold in Canada.



### **III. Detailed Findings**



## Detailed Findings

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### A. Sikhs and Hindus

#### 1. How the conflict is perceived

Participants across both the Sikh and Hindu groups shared surprisingly similar views of the “conflict” between their two communities:

- A traumatic, but mostly time-bound, series of political events that occurred in India in the 1980s (i.e., Amritsar, Indira Gandhi’s assassination, and the subsequent riots in Delhi).
- Exclusively political, not ethnic, historic, or religious in nature.
- An anomaly in an otherwise extremely close relationship between Hindus and Sikhs: *“It was all good, then political issues started cropping up; and suddenly people started separating the two groups, but we used to be the same.”*
- Largely over. *“There were a few bad years, but things have died down. It’s not an issue now.”*

Notably, all tended to downplay the conflict and say that it never was between the people, who share a strong desire to move past it and maintain the deep bonds that exist between Sikhs and Hindus. Despite some real trauma, especially for Sikhs, and “a few bad years”, most feel that this has largely been accomplished and that the conflict is now a “non-issue”.

Most spoke about friendships, intermarriage and strong social and cultural ties among Sikhs and Hindus, in both Canada and India. Participants noted that even the Gurdwaras in Canada are shared, with Hindus regularly visiting the Sikh temples for devotional and cultural activities. Many commented on the historic practice among Punjabi Hindus of making their eldest son a Sikh.

In terms of how most manage any lingering issues – and most admit there are a few -- the consensus was that *“we just don’t talk about it”* and, indeed, participants in all groups were mostly conciliatory saying that no one is to blame and both sides were wrong:

*“I have a lot of Hindu friends, we get together on a regular basis; if something gets stirred up, we just agree that everybody did something wrong and then move on.” (Sikh participant)*

Even members of the Sikh groups who themselves or their immediate families had experienced violence, discrimination, or displacement, were magnanimous, blaming the Congress party and politicians, but never the Hindu people for the violence and riots:



*“It was not ‘real Hindus’ who attacked Sikhs in the riots, it was the poorest of people living in the slums who attacked and it was completely planned by the politicians.”*

## **2. Personal involvement in the conflict**

Participants across the four focus groups had a range of personal experiences with the conflict. With many ages and both first and second generation Canadians from the Punjab represented, the groups included those who had been in Delhi during the riots, as well as those who had been elsewhere in India (including the Punjab), in Canada, or not yet born. Regardless, everyone was in some way affected, if only through the experiences of their families or communities. For some in the groups who had been in Delhi during the time of the riots, and especially Sikhs, the experience was intense:

*“There was a lot of insecurity, especially being a girl at that time; my father locked us up for 2 weeks and then he placed a dagger in all of our bags.”*

For Sikh participants who lived through events in the 1980s, whether in India or in Canada, it was a frightening time. Many reported that the initial impact was hard and led to lingering fears and issues for a few years, including fear for themselves or family in or travelling to India, an inability to get work, and, for men, cutting their hair and no longer wearing turbans.

Among Hindus, the conflict caused distress and some rifts among family and friends, but most said the impact on their lives was minimal. This was especially true for most of the younger participants in these groups. It was also true among young Sikhs, who indicated that, while their parents were affected, it was not a part of their daily life and rarely, if ever, a subject of conversation in their homes:

*“My parents experienced a lot and came here as refugees, but they don’t talk about it; I wasn’t even aware of Hindus and Muslims until the ‘90s.” (Sikh participant)*

For most, in fact, even those who were directly and traumatically affected, the conflict was relegated to another place and time and most feel that Sikhs, Hindus, the Punjab and India have all moved on to other issues and concerns:

*“I was born here, after the fact, so I don’t really have a dog in the fight; if I was in India right now, my beef wouldn’t be against Hindus, it would be against the government and all the corruption.” (Sikh participant)*

## **3. Lingering issues and sensitivities**

Most Sikh and Hindu group members admitted to some lingering issues and sensitivities between their two communities, even if below the surface and/or in small segments of their respective communities.



Among Hindu participants there was a perception of:

- Superiority/unspoken grievances among Sikhs that manifest in perceived social slights  
*“We always say Sat Sri Akal and they never say Namaste.”*  
*“My friend said right in front of me that she didn’t want her children to learn Hindi. It’s like we’re beneath them.”*
- Some suggestions of growing fundamentalism among young Sikhs
- Anti-Hindu propaganda from small segments of the Sikh community and media
- Evidence of politicization in Gurdwaras – e.g., Khalistan banners, photos of martyrdom.

Among Sikhs, there was a general consensus that:

- There was real trauma for many Sikhs without any closure or justice – with several participants claiming that those responsible for the riots remain protected and in public life within India’s Congress Party.
- The older generation and those who lived through events have had a much harder time coming to terms with what happened: *“My father went through it, and he used to say ‘if they knew what was going on, how come those people were never punished?’”*

#### **4. Relationship between the communities in Canada**

The relationship between Hindus and Sikhs in Canada was described by both sides as very positive and close, much like it is in India. Many felt that the Canadian context has contributed to this by making them feel even more a part of the same Indian (and Indo-Canadian) family, and by giving them distance from events back in India (which many left to escape), as well as a new perspective as Canadians:

*“We come here as Indians; not Sikh, Hindu, Muslim.”*

*“Coming together to solve problems; that’s the Canadian mindset, to me.”*

On the other hand, however, a number of participants in the Hindu groups feel that there is also a countervailing influence at work among a small but potentially growing group of Sikh fundamentalists, radicals and/or separatists:

*“There is an area in Brampton where they still believe and preach that Punjab should be a separate country.”(Hindu participant)*



*“In India, they gave up on that sort of thing [an independent Punjab]; here, for some reason, it’s more active – fundraising comes from here.” (Hindu participant)*

Sikh participants agreed that *“it’s not gone from the table entirely”* and that these sentiments are occasionally seen or heard in the media and Gurdwaras or from the older generation, but that it is mostly associated with those perceived to be extremist in their views and is given little credence by the larger community.

Notably, both Sikh and Hindu participants felt that there are bigger tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and, especially, within the Sikh community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

##### **5. Demands/views of each side**

The prevailing view on both sides was that there is a mutual desire between Sikhs and Hindus to move on and maintain the otherwise close relationship between their two communities. Independence for the Punjab was not seen as an active political concern for most in Canada, though all agreed it exists at the fringes.

For Hindus, talking about Sikh independence, even as a fringe element, generated some rare negative comments, suggesting that the issue is freighted with some emotion for them:

*“It’s them starting it; I think we’re the peaceful ones.” (Hindu participant)*

*“Get over it [independence].” (Hindu participant)*

It was clear that Hindus want to see a united community and are threatened by distinctions being drawn by Sikhs, which includes separation or an unwillingness to forget the past, as well as the emergence of “fundamentalism” among young people. Sikh participants dismiss out of hand the idea of independence as being a desire of their community, but they acknowledge the increasing immigration of devout young Sikhs to Canada, and the rise in the number of young people, even women, wearing turbans. Unlike Hindu participants, however, they didn’t see this as cultivating differences so much as embracing their identity and pride as Sikhs:

*“I think it’s sociological even; maybe just a desire to solidify your identity.”*

*“The longer we’ve been here, you can feel more comfortable doing something like that; when my parents first came to Canada in the 70s, (my father) wouldn’t wear a turban.”*

Among Sikh participants, the only outstanding grievance had to do with the fact that no one was ever held to account for the riots in Delhi, and that the politicians who many believe were responsible continue to be active in public life and within the Congress party. Most feel that this is an injustice but probably one that will not be remedied, and they say they have come to terms with that. They feel that time will heal that wound, as well. Despite this prevailing view, a few did feel, as one participant said, *“that it created a bit of*



*a spark that will never fully go out. If there was ever anyone who had [fundamentalist] intentions, it is [something to go back to].”*

## **6. Need for dialogue/role of government**

The strategy for dealing with the conflict between these two communities has been to not talk about it and move on. Asked about the benefits of greater dialogue it is not surprising then that there was a general wariness:

*“It’s like poking it, fuelling unnecessary fire.”*

Overall, there was not much sense that bringing Hindus and Sikhs together for dialogue is necessary or even a good idea - “*let sleeping dogs lie*” - unless, they say, the other group would like to do so. In terms of whether these two groups could have a better understanding of the other’s perspective, their feedback suggests they could. There are key areas of mutual agreement and general good will between the groups. At the same time, however, there may be little appreciation among Hindus for the fact that Sikhs have not achieved a feeling of closure or a sense of justice around the riots. Among Sikhs, there does not appear to be any recognition of the anxiety that Hindus feel about divisions being drawn by Sikhs. There is also the issue of so-called “rising fundamentalism” among Sikh youth, a point of real concern that emerged in the Hindu groups at the end of the discussion when there was a widespread call for the Canadian government to monitor the schools:

*“Young Sikhs, they’re more into it. At the universities and colleges, there is very one-sided knowledge spreading.”*

Sikhs did not seem similarly concerned, nor were they particularly aware of this concern among Hindus.

Some thought it might make more sense to bring all Indo-Canadians together into a dialogue, instead of just Sikhs and Hindus, while others thought this was a terrible idea, given all the groups and issues involved. While most felt that formal dialogue might be tricky, most thought some kind of education would be a good idea, and many suggested bringing it into the schools for discussion with young people. While many were wary, most also acknowledged that there is a need for greater understanding in both communities:

*“Talking it out is the best way to get both sides of the story; talk and try to resolve it.”*

*“It’s the elephant in the room.”*

With respect to the Canadian government engaging with the Indian government, or seeking the involvement of Indo-Canadians in that kind of effort, few thought this would be a good idea. Many said they or their families came here to get a distance from India and have little faith in the Indian government, which most agreed is rife with corruption. This sentiment was particularly strong among Sikh participants.



## C. Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamils

### 1. How the conflict is perceived

As compared to the Hindu and Sikh groups, the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils with roots in Sri Lanka was perceived quite differently by the two sides and, overall, the rift appeared to be significantly deeper between these communities, both in their home country and here in Canada.

Among the Sinhalese groups, most rejected the legitimacy of Tamil claims and criticisms against the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan government:

- Most did not view the almost 30-year armed conflict that ended in 2009 as a war, but rather as a terrorist uprising with illegitimate means and ends. Tamils *“want more than they are entitled to”*
- Grievances by Tamils in Sri Lanka are overstated, do not convey the whole story, and are, on the whole, inaccurate (*“There’s no discrimination; they have more rights than the French in English-speaking Canada.”*)
- International public opinion and media are biased, one-sided and hold Sri Lanka to a higher standard than other countries. Talk of genocide and war crimes by the government of Sri Lanka is *“hurtful”* to the Sinhalese. They feel misunderstood, demonized, alienated, and lacking a voice: *“Sinhalese were affected too”*
- View LTTE/Tigers as illegitimate, militant and/or aggressive Tamils that were *“brainwashed”*, but distinguish between them and the Tamil people more broadly with whom they express some sympathy for having suffered under extremists.
- See the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict as largely over: *“People don’t want to go back, the conflict is over and we’re moving on.”*

Most Sinhalese also downplayed the existence of any residual issues affecting Tamils in Sri Lanka, noting that the conflict had been mostly contained within the North. They further noted that even there, the Tamil community had been *“absolutely oppressed by the Tigers”* and were happy to see them defeated. Most believe that any sense of lingering conflict is being fueled by those outside of Sri Lanka who *“hope to win the war of minds outside of the country in an effort to start things back up.”*

Tamil participants had very different views. The general consensus among participants in the two Tamil groups was that the conflict was a *“war”* based on a legitimate struggle for independence made necessary because of systemic discrimination against Tamils, violence and insecurity in the North, and ethnic cleansing and war crimes committed by an unrepentant government. While Sinhalese participants were of the view that the conflict is now over, the Tamil view was that the issues remain very much unresolved:





*“Nobody is moving forward. The government is systematically resettling Sinhalese in our area. With that, there is no solution, there is no peace.”*

Moreover, Tamil participants were inclined to defend the Tamil Tigers/LTTE or downplay their characterization as terrorists:

*“Tigers were doing the right thing after all.”*

*“One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.”*

With respect to the perceived origins of the conflict, participants from both the Tamil and Sinhalese groups described it as an ethnic difference that turned into a tension and then an armed conflict/war largely resulting from British colonialism and post-Independence politics and events. For Sinhalese participants, the British had been seen as favouring the Tamils and over-investing in their political influence and power relative to their numbers. Among Tamil participants there was an acknowledgement of this perception among the Sinhalese majority, and agreement that the British did, indeed, leave a “power vacuum” and simmering resentments behind them when they left, which ultimately resulted in a backlash against the Tamil minority and the rise of Sinhalese nationalism. One member of the Tamil focus groups described the situation as “*similar to Rwanda*,” alluding to the historical favoritism shown to the Tutsis over the Hutus by the Belgians. There were mentions across both sets of groups about the impact of the Sinhalese official language policy and reforms to university admissions as events that fuelled the tension considerably.

For those in the Tamil groups, this was seen as the beginning of “systematic targeting and abuse” of the Tamil population by Sinhalese politicians and governments in Sri Lanka. The general consensus was that growing human rights issues for Tamils and the failure of non-violent methods of protest and demands for accommodation led to legitimate grievances and the formation of the LTTE. From the perspective of the Tamil participants, the conflict, as it has played out since independence, has been very much about human rights violations and ethnically-based discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka, with the eventual call for statehood emerging as a result.

For those in the Sinhalese groups, the prevailing view was that while ethnic divisions and colonialism had contributed to the conflict, politics have been the main culprit since independence. The tensions and power struggles of post-independence Sri Lanka had been simply exploited by Tamil extremists and the LTTE for political gain:

*“They saw an opportunity to get their own country.”*

*“It’s about power and money. They [LTTE] don’t care about the Tamil people. That’s not their real motive.”*



## 2. Personal connection/involvement

As with the other groups, participants in the Tamil and Sinhalese groups were of mixed ages and backgrounds and included both first and second generation Canadians. Along with their very different takes on the issues dividing their two communities, participants from the Sinhalese and Tamil groups also recounted very different personal experiences of the conflict. For all of them, however, the conflict has affected their lives and their sense of identity and community.

Most of the Sinhalese participants who had come to Canada from Sri Lanka tended to minimise problems between Sinhalese and Tamils back home. Those who had either lived or travelled there had little familiarity with the North. They also reported having had either minimal or good relations with Tamils, whom they knew mostly as either labourers or poor members of the community. In Canada, however, where Tamils far outnumber the Sinhalese, Sinhalese participants described somewhat tense relations, citing many examples of how they had suffered discrimination, bullying, intimidation, and even violence and vandalism at the hands of Tamils:

*“During the Diwali festival, there was a huge billboard saying “don’t drink Sri Lankan tea, it’s like drinking the blood of the Tamil people”. It was hateful. We had food thrown at our cars.”*

*“My son has had problems at high school. Tamils came and threw stones in 2008 at one of his cricket games here.”*

*“We tried to come together for Sri Lanka Day at Harbourfront, but Tamils were getting threats from other Tamils about participating.”*

Among the Tamil participants, many had experienced traumatic loss and suffering in Sri Lanka, including the direct experience of violence and war, the death of family members and the destruction of homes. Further, Canada represented their escape from this suffering:

*“I actually moved here because of the war. My Mom’s house was bombed. It affected me a lot growing up. My cousins lived there – we were scared for them - and my friends from university were very involved in the conflict.”*

*“I lost my father, my classmate was raped by troops, and my friend’s brother was killed. We kept moving and moving, and then we came here.”*

Despite some challenges with being a visible minority in Canada, Tamil participants said that life here has been a huge improvement over life in Sri Lanka, significantly minimizing the impact of the conflict on their lives, although most also indicated that they have family and friends back home who continue to be affected directly. They also noted that the final months of the war in 2009 had prompted considerable distress for them, and had led to the rise in activism here in Canada, with many Tamils reporting that they had attended protests during that time.



### **3. Relationship between the communities in Canada**

From the perspective of the Sinhalese participants, there are significant tensions between the two communities in Canada, with Tamils largely to blame, whether they are organized into politicized factions or groups, or merely acting as individuals, like schoolyard bullies. They see the Tamil diaspora in Canada as fomenting militant and extremist views that are out of touch with the reality on the ground in Sri Lanka and that have no currency or support among Tamils back home.

For their part, Tamil participants were inclined to downplay conflicts between the two communities here in Canada. They say that they have more positive relationships and even friendships with Sinhalese here than they did in Sri Lanka, and that Canada's open media has fostered greater understanding between the two groups. Nonetheless, they still feel that there is little understanding of the Tamil cause and a tendency to brand all Tamils as "Tigers" or terrorists and to delegitimize the very real grievances that continue to confront the Tamil people.

Most described little-to-no formal engagement between the two communities in Canada. A few mentioned some aborted efforts to bring people together (even for cultural events) that failed because of mistrust or threats and intimidation. Among some in the Sinhalese groups there was a sense that "*there are people in the Tamil community that don't want us coming together – they have a vested interest in keeping the conflict going.*" And while a number were more moderate, quite a few felt that Tamils harbour real animosity toward the Sinhalese:

*"It has been instilled in Tamils to hate us"*

The participants in the Tamil groups disagreed and even commented on this as a common misapprehension of them held by the Sinhalese population in Canada.

### **4. Demands/views of each side**

Among Sinhalese participants, the general consensus is that here in Canada, Tamils are trying to keep the struggle for independence alive and that they are more politicized and extreme than Tamils back home in Sri Lanka.

*"The Tamil diaspora is trying to take revenge for the Tigers losing the war."*

They are very critical of the LTTE as militant extremists who they see as manipulating and intimidating the Tamil community and muzzling moderates while getting in the way of any kind of cooperation or engagement with Sinhalese people in Canada. (Notably, there was no echoing of this sentiment among the Tamil participants who were mostly defensive of the LTTE and did not mention any kind of strong-arming tactics or sense of oppression.) They also view Tamils as having a numerical advantage in Canada that they press to try and sway the media, the government and the public. Many also felt that there is a generation of



young Canadian Tamils who have been politicized, even though they have never been to Sri Lanka and do not have first-hand knowledge of what it is “*really like*”.

*“On Heroes Day, they celebrate suicide bombers...(and show) pictures of remains; these guys grew up militant all the way through.”*

Feeling vilified and misunderstood, Sinhalese participants expressed the view that non-Sri Lankan critics of Sri Lanka should stop trying to muddle in others’ affairs.

*“All these groups are very irresponsible; have they even been to Sri Lanka?”*

There was little appreciation within the Tamil groups for any grievances among Sinhalese living in Canada. There was also virtually no mention of intimidation, bullying or other types of overt conflict directed toward Sinhalese people by Tamils in Canada. Many felt there is greater understanding here in Canada among the Sinhalese of how Tamils have been treated in Sri Lanka, but also, to some extent, a wilful blindness and a wariness to engage in the issues with the Tamil community in Canada because of its relatively large numbers and ongoing involvement in events happening in Sri Lanka.

Among both Tamil and Sinhalese participants who said they have mixed social relationships (and there were a few), most said they simply do not talk about the conflict-related issues or mistrust between their communities, although some said they have tried to make light of any inter-community tension or have worked to bring their communities closer together.

## **5. Need for dialogue/role of government**

There were mixed views about whether dialogue is possible or wise between Sinhalese and Tamils in Canada. Some felt that there is a great need for this, while many were wary, or felt the other side is not willing, or that the timing is not right. All thought the Canadian government has a role to play, however. Sinhalese participants felt that Prime Minister Harper’s government should crack down further on fundraising efforts by the remnants of the LTTE and not isolate Sri Lanka, while Tamils felt they should place far greater focus on human rights issues affecting Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority, as well as other minority communities in the country (e.g., Muslims).

Notably, most across all the groups felt that education is sorely needed, especially among young people in Canada, about the “realities” facing Tamils in Sri Lanka, although the two sides had completely opposite views about what these realities are.



## C. Jews and Arabs

### 1. How the conflict is perceived

Substantial differences in perceptions about the conflict in the Middle East are evident between Jews and Arabs. Among Arabs, the consensus was that it is about land, politics and power, and only nominally about religion. They see it as the basis for every other conflict in the region, involving multiple self-interested players, and constituting an enormous unresolved injustice for Palestinians. There was a lot of talk about the ongoing conflict as a human rights issue, given the perceived power imbalance between Israelis and Palestinians, and the ongoing restrictions on movement, economic activity, and access to basic resources experienced by the Palestinians. Most saw this situation as getting worse:

*“It’s about property, apartheid, racism; Palestinians living in terrible conditions just a few kilometers away from the Israelis.”*

*“Probably the biggest and longest injustice in modern history.”*

*“You cannot expect Palestinians to stop fighting for their rights.”*

The focus groups of Jewish participants were comprised of both Jews who were born in Canada who had never been to Israel and those who had emigrated from Israel to Canada.

In these groups there was no consensus on the nature of the conflict: participants identified a mix of “*land*”, “*territory*”, and “*politics*” as root causes. Many, however, seemed to think that the conflict is primarily religion-based and more about Muslims versus Jews than about Arabs and Palestinians versus Israelis. All felt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is long-standing, with deep historical roots in the region. Most also saw it as fundamentally about the survival of the Jewish State and the Jewish people: Israel must keep itself safe and do whatever it deems essential in order to maintain safety and security, including building and defending settlements, taking military action when provoked, exercising ongoing control of the occupied Palestinian Territories, and constructing the security wall. Overall, little sympathy was expressed for Palestinians or the Palestinian cause (“*There is no such thing as Palestinians.*”). There was a sense that Arab states were protracting the conflict and should just absorb the people from Palestine. There was also a sense that Israel “*should not give any more concessions.*”

While not everyone was equally “hard line” in the Jewish groups, there was pressure exerted by some to quell dissent from fellow participants who voiced more moderate views. A few of the younger, female participants, and to some extent some of the native-born Israelis, were more inclined to see some subtleties and nuances when discussing the Jews’ relationship with Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, but they did not directly contradict their more strident colleagues on such issues. There were several comments made to the effect that high-profile members of the Jewish diaspora who are critical of Israel (e.g., Naomi Klein) are “*self-hating Jews.*” At the same time, there was some sense among a minority that being critical



of Israel is not inherently anti-Semitic (“*I don’t think opposing Israel is anti-Semitic*”). This view, however, was limited. Most of the Canadian Jews who had not lived in Israel saw any criticism of Israel as being “anti-Jewish.” “*I’m a supporter of Israel, but if I disagree [with Israel], I don’t criticize,*” said one.

Most in the Arab groups were quick to differentiate between their neutral or positive feelings towards the Jewish people on one hand and their antipathy towards the Zionist State of Israel on the other. Meanwhile, there was a tendency by many in the Jewish focus groups to use the words “Arab” and “Muslim” interchangeably – even when reminded of the large numbers of Arab Christians in the Middle East – and by some to openly express notable anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment, casting Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians as “*terrorists*”, and the Muslim religion and its adherents as inherently violent and aggressive:

*“Doesn’t the Qur’an say, ‘kill everyone that is not like you?’”*

*“I can see the world taken over by Muslims.”*

*“They [Arabs] only understand power.”*

Both the Arab and Jewish groups generally agreed that the situation is complicated and confusing and exists at the vortex of some enormous geo-political challenges. Most also felt that it is likely unsolvable. Moreover, even among those optimists who thought there might be a possible solution to the current conflict, there was no consensus in either the Jewish or Arab groups as to what the appropriate solution might be, nor whether a “One-State Solution” or a “Two-State Solution” might be preferable.

## **2. Personal connection/involvement**

In these groups as in the others, a mix of ages and backgrounds were represented among participants, including new Canadians and Canadian-born participants. In the Arab groups, some participants identified as both Arab and Palestinian while others did not; for the Jewish groups, some had been born in the Jewish diaspora and some came from Israel.

Among the Arab participants, many had themselves or their immediate families been directly affected by the conflict. There were many stories of hardship, death and loss that were shared:

*“In ’67, I saw the dead bodies everywhere. Still I hear the voice of my Mom saying, ‘Oh, the soldier is coming,’ and then 30 people were killed while we were hiding.”*

*“There were curfews, shootings, random searches by soldiers; I’ve seen people shot in my school. A normal day would be tear gas all around.”*

These participants still maintained many and strong connections with people back home. They said that being in Canada does provide some emotional distance and helps the trauma to recede to some extent,



though it never goes away entirely. Most indicated that they have some involvement in Arab and/or Palestinian activities here in Canada, but these are mainly cultural activities as opposed to political ones.

For their part, almost all the participants in the Jewish groups reported a very strong connection to Israel, even if they had not lived there, though most had visited. “*Israel is a home for the Jews.*” Many see it as “*safe place*” for Jews. All agreed that a “*strong, healthy*” Israel is vital to the Jewish community and its very survival:

*“My success as a Jew is linked to the strength of Israel.”*

*“There is such universal anti-Semitism...Israel needs to be strong.”*

Perhaps not surprisingly, there was also a strong ongoing connection to Israel among the former Israelis (including a former IDF soldier), but many reported having experienced a change in their perceptions of the conflict since arriving in Canada. While living in Israel, they acknowledged, they had a much more one-sided view of the conflict. (“*In Israel you only see one side – the Israeli media – so patriotic. Now I consider the other side*”). For these former Israelis, there was some, albeit limited, sympathy for the plight of Palestinians. This was not as evident among the Jewish participants who had not lived in Israel. As one Canadian-born participant noted, “*Palestinians don’t just want to control Israel, they want to control the world...they take so much pleasure from war.*”

Among Arabs, there was a broad consensus that Canada is a good place to live, that life is good here and much better for them than at home, in the Gulf countries, or in the US:

*“Any Arab would come to Canada if they can get a visa.”*

*“Canada is smart, it wants people who want to make a life, it wants professionals, skilled workers: ‘you’re smart, you’re good, we want you’. It’s different in the Gulf countries; there, it’s never home.”*

Like the Israelis, the Arabs who had immigrated to Canada had a sense that being in Canada had broadened their perspective on the issues and given them more insights into the views of the other side. While many mentioned the difficulty of being Arab in the West today, and all the negative stereotypes that accompany that identity, they felt Canada to be a fairly safe place:

*“It’s a big challenge being Arab or with an Arab name; big challenge to be cool, be friendly, every day is what matters; everyday my skin, my name, my nose...they are there; here [in Canada] there is harmony that I wish would translate to other parts of the world.”*

### **3. Relationship between the communities in Canada**

Across all the groups, participants said that there is limited interaction and little-to-no-formal engagement between their two communities, whether in Canada or in Israel/Palestine, although many said they had



relationships on a personal level. The general feeling was that “one-to-one, there are no issues in Toronto” and that among friends certain issues and difficult discussions are simply avoided.

Among the Arab participants, some felt there an was awkwardness in relations exists between Arabs and Jews:

*“I went to (an) Israeli festival and as soon as one guy heard me speak Arabic, they all turned around and looked at me. I walked out. I would love to have Israeli friends I could talk to, but they’re not interested.”*

*“Because of the conflict, I still have trouble relating to Jews. Some of them are nice people, some of them are not, just like anyone else, but I still feel nervous. I’ve never had a discussion with someone who is [on the other side of the conflict].”*

Also within the Arab groups, there was a strong consensus that the Jewish community has more influence with the Canadian media than does the Arab community. They felt this was even more the case with respect to the current federal government, which they view as being decidedly aligned with Israel. The widespread characterization of all Palestinians as “terrorists” continues to be a concern.

Within the Jewish groups, most applauded the Canadian government’s position on Israel and saw it as a move in the right direction:

*“Most governments do not support Israel, so it’s good that the Canadian government does.”*

*“Stephen Harper has been a stalwart. It’s the best government for Israel.”*

Most in the Jewish groups felt that there is a general lack of support for Israel around the world, and they expressed a strong sense that anti-Semitism is present in virtually any criticism that is leveled at Israel. For these participants there was a strong view that Israel is held to a higher standard of behavior than other states. There was a strong sense that Jews are portrayed unfairly by the media (“*we are always the scapegoats*” “*there’s a double standard*”) – not just in Canada (especially by The Toronto Star), but also around the world - and that Israel has taken a real beating from the left, in particular. They feel that Israel and Jews have little support from the international community, even though they acknowledge support from the U.S., Germany and Canada. They believe that there is a much more sympathetic portrayal of the Palestinians from most quarters. The UN was described as “*a joke*” by some because of what they perceived to be its ingrained anti-Israel bias. As one participant noted, “*they (the Palestinians) have definitely won the PR war.*”

Many in the Jewish groups saw evidence of the conflict and anti-Semitism in Canada (“*it’s discussed in the office*”), citing such activities as a boycott of the LCBO and Israeli wines, bomb threats at the Jewish Community Centre, the defacing of graves in Toronto and Montreal, demonstrations in support of Palestine at Dundas Square, the boycott of the Toronto International Film Festival in 2009 when it featured Tel Aviv





as its spotlight city for film, student clashes at York University, and events like Israeli Apartheid week on some Canadian university campuses.

And while most in the Jewish groups said that on an individual level there are no issues between Jews and Arabs or Palestinians, for some there was a sense that tensions do exist, and for others there was a real sense that Arabs (which several perceived to be synonymous with Muslims) are a threat:

*“There are too many Arabs being let into the country;”*

*“They [Arabs] are going to take over Europe.”*

Still, it should be noted that one or two dissenting voices in the Jewish groups noted that there are some Arab groups in Toronto actively involved in the fight against anti-Semitism, and these individuals pushed back against some of the more negative depictions of Muslims and Palestinians offered up by their peers.

#### **4. Demands/views of each side**

There wasn't much understanding of the views or the historical experiences of the other side across these groups. Arab participants were more inclined to be conciliatory towards the other side than the Jewish participants, and they carefully distinguished between Israel's politics and the Jewish people. However, there was little recognition by the Arab participants of the historical importance of the State of Israel within the Jewish mindset, nor of the history of persecution and loss suffered by the Jewish people and how central it is to their shared experience and ongoing anxiety about their survival as a people. Most Arabs understood intellectually the perceived need of the Israeli government and military to defend the State of Israel against outside threats, but they also felt that such claims were often used as a guise under which to hold onto political power and to acquire as much land as possible for Israel, regardless of the rights of the Palestinian people. Needless to say, the Arabs and Palestinians wholeheartedly rejected any characterization of the Palestinian people as “terrorists”.

Among the Jewish groups there was little apparent understanding of what the Palestinians or Arabs actually want, but most saw any aspirations of the Palestinians towards statehood as a direct threat to Israel and the Jewish people. Arabs, Palestinians and Muslims (for the terms were used interchangeably) were generally portrayed negatively in the Jewish focus groups, with such terms as “warmongers”, “terrorists”, and “religious fundamentalists” being used liberally to describe them throughout the discussions.

Both sides said they want to see Canada stand up for the rights of their respective people and feel it would be consistent with Canadian values to do so. Of course, given their respective views, the actions they want to see taken by Canada are diametrically opposed. The Arab groups commented negatively about the positions of the Canadian government regarding the Middle East. They were especially critical of Canada's recent vote against the resolution seeking non-member state recognition of Palestine at the UN, while the Jewish focus group participants were very pleased with Canada's opposition to that effort.



While few could identify a workable solution to the conflict, for the Jewish participants the principal concern was Israel's security, while for Arab participants the principal goal was the protection of fundamental human rights for the Palestinians. Arab participants were virtually unanimous in calling for the Palestinians to have their own state, guaranteed security, and control of the natural resources needed to foster economic development.

*"We want education, healthcare, water..."*

##### **5. Need for dialogue/role of government**

Generally, there was little interest in pursuing dialogue between Jews and Arabs in Canada. Among the Arab participants, there was a sense that it would be pointless to try and change the opinions of those in the Jewish community with hardened and emotional views, and that the two sides are too far apart. *"I don't imagine myself talking to a Jewish person who hates Arabs/Palestinians"*. Among the Jewish participants there was a real lack of trust of Arabs or Palestinians, which emerged as a potential impediment to any meaningful engagement.

Despite the lack of receptivity to dialogue among both Jews and Arabs, there were a few people with moderate views and a sense of goodwill who expressed interest in bringing their communities together to foster mutual understanding and help resolve or reduce the impact of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East for the people living there.

When it comes to government involvement in the situation in Israel/Palestine, as noted, the Jewish participants were buoyed by Canada's pro-Israel stance, and the Arabs groups were disheartened by it, saying that they do not trust or respect the current Canadian government's involvement in the issues:

*"Not this government; I lost hope with this government when it comes to the conflict in Palestine; I can't sense any genuine effort to promote peace. This government is an ardent supporter for Zionism."*



## D. Conclusions

The findings across the twelve sessions reveal that there are some commonalities, but also significant differences in a variety of key areas including: assessments of the nature and causes of the conflicts; the extent to which the conflicts have had a direct affect on individuals and, by extension, their communities in Canada; changes in assessments of the conflict among those who have emigrated to Canada from the region of conflict; and, receptivity to activities in Canada intended to address on-going issues arising from the homeland conflicts.

Within each pair of focus groups conducted among those from the same side of each conflict reveal significant consistency. In other words, the findings of the two sessions conducted among Hindus were largely consistent as were the two sessions among Sikhs. This consistency was also evident for the pairs of groups conducted among Sri Lankan Tamils/ Sinhalese and Jews/Arabs.

The following summarizes key findings and outlines where commonalities and differences were observed. It also provides insight into the implications of the issues raised and the differences or similarities in responses to key issues discussed during each of the twelve sessions

**All participants in all sessions acknowledge the existence of each of the specific conflicts and are able to articulate a perceived version of each, with references to their perspective on the specific causes and catalysts that drove tensions between groups into full-fledged clashes.** Even though the genesis of all three conflicts occurred at some distance of time from the present-day, knowledge or views of the perceived historical antecedents and reasons for the conflicts remains apparent among all participants in the focus group sessions. While younger participants – particularly those born in Canada with parents who had a more direct involvement in or link to each conflict than they themselves have had – are less likely to identify specific historical roots or cite definitive causes of the conflict, there is a recognition among these young Canadians of the history of the conflicts and at least some understanding that their parents, families or communities have been affected by them. Young, Canadian-born Hindus and Sikhs are least likely to have a clear understanding of the conflict, while those participants with links to the Tamil/Sinhalese conflict and the Jewish/Arab conflict are significantly more likely to hold stronger and more engaged views about the struggles between their respective communities.

**In all sessions, participants report that at least some presence of each conflict continues to exist in Canada, although the strength or salience of each varies considerably by conflict.**

For all three conflicts, both sides report that they have or continue to feel the effects of their respective conflicts in Canada.

Representatives of the Hindu and Sikh communities are least likely to report initially that the conflict between their communities continues to be felt in Canada. However, probing in the sessions reveals that despite an articulation and evidence of general goodwill and good relations between the representatives of



each community in Canada, residual sensitivities are latent. The ongoing evidence of the conflict in Canada is related to a cluster of issues that emerged in the discussion sessions, including: perceived slights felt by Hindus from Sikhs (e.g., a failure to acknowledge Hindus' efforts to greet Sikhs with a traditional Sikh salutation and the absence of any reciprocal efforts by Sikhs to greet Hindus with Hindu greetings; some evidence of anti-Hindu propaganda emanating from the Sikh community; a sense, albeit limited, of a growing politicization within a small segment of the Sikh community; and, some concerns about conflict-related reminders being displayed in Gurdwaras as propaganda.

Sikhs also identify some specific issues that indicate that the conflict between the two communities continues to be felt in some limited ways, but, for Sikhs, the conflict is not related to Hindu activity or perceptions in Canada, but to a perceived irresolution and absence of justice in India as a result of the riots in 1994 that were sparked by the raid on Amritsar's Golden Temple and the subsequent assassination of India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. For some, the perceived irresolution or lack of repercussions for those seen as responsible for the riots is a source of some on-going pain and resentment that continues to be raised among Sikhs in Canada.

Interestingly, despite some, though limited, evidence of the conflict continuing to be apparent in Canada between the Hindu and Sikh communities, representatives of both communities report that any remnants of the conflict are largely non-existent in India itself.

By contrast, the presence of the Sri Lankan conflict remains relatively strong in terms of the views and perceptions of both the Tamil and Sinhalese communities in Canada. While representatives of both sides of the conflict report some sympathy for the other and indicate that some, limited personal friendships between members of each group exist in Canada, the discussion sessions suggest that there is no significant, positive relationship between Tamils and Sinhalese as communities in Canada and that long-standing differences in perceptions of the conflict and its origins persist. The two communities are largely isolated from one another and each side readily identifies a viewpoint that highlights and emphasizes the perceived wrongs perpetrated by the other in Sri Lanka.

Sinhalese participants tend to believe that Tamils are keeping the conflict alive by exaggerating the armed conflict that ended with the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. Tamil participants believe that they continue to be branded and viewed as terrorists in Sinhalese versions of the conflict.

Even among young, Canadian-born participants – particularly young Tamils – the conflict in Sri Lanka is clearly evident in their lives in Canada. They tend to describe their roots as Tamil rather than Sri Lankan. Some indicate that they are or wish to be more actively involved in aiding the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

There is little common ground apparent in perceptions of the conflict. Most Tamils believe that the conflict is still on-going in Sri Lanka and hold strong views about perceived persistent abuses of Tamils and



perceived irresolution of issues between the two groups since 2009. By contrast, the Sinhalese are insistent that the conflict has been resolved in Sri Lanka and that any on-going challenges are largely fuelled by Tamils outside of Sri Lanka.

Clearly, a substantial divide exists between the two communities in Canada, with issues around the conflict and perceptions of the conflict (including whether or not the conflict was, in fact, resolved in 2009) continuing to be relevant and current to both. The findings of the discussion sessions suggest that there is little indication that any mutual understanding and change in perceptions on behalf of either side is unlikely in the foreseeable future. While there is only limited overt tension between the two communities in Canada, Canadians on both sides of the Tamil-Sinhalese on both sides of the conflict report that there is very limited trust between the two sides and little optimism for improved relations in the short-term.

Similarly, the Jewish/Arab conflict continues to be felt by the representatives of the two communities in Canada. While both sides report that relations between Jews and Arabs in Canada lack overt tension, at least some wariness persists due to the long-standing and on-going conflicts in the Middle East. Both groups report that there is little formal interaction between the communities in Canada. Both sides agree that the conflict continues to be an important part of their daily lives even in Canada, though those who have immigrated to Canada from the conflict region concede that distance has provided some healthy perspective and led to more openness regarding the claims and views of the other side.

Almost all participants in the Jewish discussion groups reported an on-going, deep and unwavering attachment to Israel. Given their reported strong concern about perceived historical and enduring anti-Semitism, they were almost unanimous in reporting that the preservation and security of Israel as a Jewish state is essential to the well-being and survival of the Jewish people, regardless of where they live. All, including those without any experience of living in Israel, acknowledged this strong attachment. Given this unshakeable attachment, Jewish participants tended to express wariness towards their Arab counterparts in Canada and, in some cases, notable antipathy toward Arab states in the Middle East and the Arab diaspora (most particularly Muslims), including those in Canada.

Participants in the Arab sessions also held strong views about the conflict and, those who had immigrated to Canada from Arab states and Palestine, described deep traumas when discussing the experience of the conflict back in their home lands. The traumas remain germane to their day-to-day lives in Canada (particularly for those with family members in the Middle East), but do not tend to spill over into any active tension between Jewish and Arab Canadians. In fact, many Arabs in the two discussion sessions that were held reported a palpable sense of relief at having left the Middle East to live in Canada.

Overall, the findings across the twelve sessions indicate that all three of the conflicts continue to have at least some resonance for each of the groups and all “sides” of each conflict in Canada. While the effects of the conflicts are decidedly less pronounced between Hindus and Sikhs compared to those with a relationship to both the Tamil/Sinhalese and Jewish/Arab conflict, residual evidence of on-going issues is apparent.



**Most in all sessions tend to agree that living in Canada brings a different perspective to their views of the conflicts.**

Regardless of the ethno-cultural or religious make-up of the focus groups, participants in all of the sessions who had immigrated to Canada from a conflict region reported that they had gained a perspective on the struggle as a result of living in Canada.

While the conflict continues to be felt to a lesser or greater degree among representatives of all six of the ethno-cultural groups, there is a sense that Canada not only physically distances them from their respective conflicts, but, to some degree, distances them emotionally because of its safety, its perceived tolerance (as shown by the fact that an ethnically mixed population is able to peacefully co-exist in Canada) and its relative security. While participants in all sessions identify some examples of behaviour or activity that raise some, albeit limited, concerns for their particular community, most acknowledge that Canada provides a safe and secure home. Almost all report that the preservation of that safety and security is important to them.

Further, those who have come to Canada from places of conflict tend to report that greater personal objectivity and understanding have resulted as a result of regular exposure to more balanced and objective media coverage in Canada. While some participants report that a perceived media bias against their community exists both in Canada and elsewhere in the world, most acknowledge that Canada's media and commentators tend to provide a relatively fairer and more objective view of conflicts than is the case in their home lands or in other parts of the world.

Many participants also report that Canada's reputation as tolerant and accepting has had a positive impact in alleviating personal stresses arising from the particular conflict to which they are linked. Not only do they feel safer and more secure, they view Canada and Canadians as being open to a variety of communities and backgrounds. They also indicate that being in Canada allows them to focus on their personal lives, including the rearing, well-being and success of their families and their meeting their ability to fulfil personal career or work-related ambitions.

**Limited receptivity to dialogue between each side of each conflict emerged across the twelve sessions. Most participants in the focus groups saw little value in coming together to discuss issues that divide the communities and were wary of reviving issues that would spark old or dormant grievances. For many there was a sense that, in Canada, communities need to “move on.”**

Representatives of all three conflicts tended to agree that overt efforts to engage in dialogues between communities on both sides of their conflict would change little. The main objection tended to centre on a concern that such efforts would re-engage conflicts, re-ignite old grievances or create a greater divide than currently exists within Canada. While the findings provide evidence that all of the conflicts persist between communities in Canada, there is also a sense that relations between the two sides of each conflict are capable of co-existing within the broader Canadian community, at least on a day-to-day basis, with limited



reference to the conflicts. While this tends to reveal a deliberate effort to suppress tensions related to conflicts in favour of sustaining harmony, there tends to be a view that little benefit will accrue by raising issues and that there is even a danger of igniting differences by doing so.

Despite limited openness to the pursuit of active or formalized dialogue in Canada between communities on either side of conflicts, most agree that educational initiatives aimed at young members of the various communities could be useful. The challenge of such efforts, however, is that both sides of each conflict believe that the ‘other side’ needs to be made aware of the respective viewpoints and, in many cases, grievances. The motive for support for educational activities appears to be driven by a sense that each community wishes to ensure that its own perspective and distillation of the reasons for and consequences of the conflict are understood by the other. Only some participants across the twelve discussion groups were motivated by a genuine interest in ensuring that a real and accurate understanding of the conflicts is obtained through educational activities. Still, there appears to be value in pursuing efforts to explain and educate young members of each community about the conflict between their “side” and the other. Sensitivity and considerable consultation with both sides will be required to ensure that a fair and acceptable overview of the conflict is provided in any educational initiatives.

**During the discussion groups there was very limited interest in having the Canadian government take more specific actions to bring together Canadian communities from both sides of each of the conflicts emerged in the discussion.** In fact, in most sessions, participants were either uninterested in participating in or unable to imagine any benefits arising from any government efforts to further understanding or promote good relations between communities on either side of the examined conflicts. For many, this type of government involvement was deemed potentially problematic, as it risked opening old wounds and sparking increased inter-community tensions by re-visiting issues that discussants perceived as causing little day-to-day tension in Canada.

Some participants pointed out that inter-community activities and socialization between sides is or might be more likely to promote good relations between both sides of the conflicts in Canada, although the efficacy of such activities were unclear. For most, one-on-one relationships and even friendships exist between those on either side of the conflict, but little support for more formal relationships or orchestrated dialogues by the government was apparent.

Hindus and Sikhs reported significant socialization between them and, as a result, did not see much benefit, if any, from more formal efforts intended to bring the two communities together.

While interaction between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities in Canada is limited, some participants reported that they did interact and socialize with one another from time to time.

Similarly, there was little interaction between Jews and Arabs in Canada, but participants from both sides of the conflict acknowledged that on a one-on-one basis, there were relationships between Arab and Jewish



individuals in Canada. Further, some Jewish participants noted that there were Arab groups in Canada that were actively involved in fighting anti-Semitism. They were both supportive and grateful for the activity of these groups, but were disinclined to see a government role in these types of activities.

Notably, in all of these cases, there was a sense that any socialization between representatives of either side of each conflict deliberately avoids dealing with potentially contentious issues. In fact, for most, there was a conscious effort to avoid any reference to these conflicts when socializing or interacting with their counterparts from the “other side”.

**Across the twelve sessions, no consensus emerged around the value of Canadian government involvement or activity in resolving or commenting upon conflicts in the regions where the conflicts have or continue to exist.**

Both Hindus and Sikhs were largely dismissive of any Canadian government-led efforts to reduce inter-community conflict in India, but, this was due almost entirely to a sense that any such efforts would have no impact or influence, particularly given what is perceived by both sides as a corrupt and inept government in India.

When Tamils and Sinhalese were probed on their assessments of Canadian government involvement in Sri Lanka, there was some willingness evident on the part of both sides to see the federal government expand its involvement, although each side had significantly different reasons for supporting that idea. Tamils wanted the Canadian government to comment or act upon the Tamils’ perceptions of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese wanted the Canadian government to be more supportive of the efforts by the Sri Lankan state to quash the perceived remains of the LTTE (both in Sri Lanka and in Canada) and help Sri Lanka put the conflict behind itself and focus on promoting development.

While both Jewish and Arab participants were open to Canada’s government taking strong positions with respect to issues in the Middle East generally and in Israel specifically, the actions and pronouncements of the current government generate very different reactions from these two communities. The Jewish participants were very satisfied with the Canadian government’s involvement in the Middle East because of its strong support of Israel. The Arab participants were disappointed with what they perceived to be the federal government’s unequivocal support for Israeli policies and Canada’s opposition to the U.N. resolution to recognize Palestine as a non-member state.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is an expectation that Canada will have a view and, potentially, an active role to play in confronting overseas conflicts, particularly in those regions from which many Canadians originate or where they have a very personal connection to the conflict. The challenge is that one side will necessarily disagree with the nature or extent of Canadian statements or interventions in support of the other.





## IV. Appendices



## Appendix A – Description of Recruitment

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Participants for each of the groups were identified and reached using rigorous recruitment methods and a variety of tactics.

In the main, *The Strategic Counsel* relied on our regular recruiting agency TRN, which maintains a data base of potential focus group participants assembled from a variety of sources, whom they pre-screen and identify according to a wide range of demographic and other variables. This was the primary source of recruiting for all sessions.

Where necessary, the list was supplemented with further recruitment from lists of specific organizations, such as community and settlement groups, and through a ‘snowball’ approach whereby qualified recruits were asked to identify other potential participants within their own personal networks who share the same ethno-cultural profile.

Almost all Sikh and Hindu participants were recruited from the available database, with the exception of a few who were recruited from lists provided by India Rainbow Community Services.

For the Tamil/Sinhalese sessions, most participants were found through the recruiter’s existing database. In addition, a small number of Sinhalese participants were recruited using lists from the Sinhalese Society and CultureLink, a local settlement organization. Finally, a very small number of participants for both the Tamil and Sinhalese sessions were located using the ‘snowball’ technique and were screened to ensure they met the qualifications for participation.

All Jewish/Israeli participants in the Jewish focus groups were recruited from the available database. Palestinian and Middle Eastern participants were recruited from a combination of existing databases, and from lists available from CultureLink and Arab Newcomers, another local settlement group.

All participants were screened to ensure that they met the requirements of the study and fit the profile of participants required for each specific set of groups.



## Appendix B – Recruitment Screener

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### Summary of Recruitment Requirements:

A total of 12 groups (2 Sikh, 2 Hindu, 2 Tamil, 2 Sinhalese, 2 Jewish, 2 Arab)

Groups approximately 2 hours in length. The first group will begin at 5.30 p.m. followed by a group at 7:30 p.m.

9 recruited for each group

Incentives \$150 per person

City	Date	Locations	Group Characteristics
Brampton	March 19, 2013	<b>Contract Testing Inc.</b> 119 West Drive <b>Brampton</b> , ON L6T 2J6	5:30 pm Hindus 7:30 pm Hindus
	March 20, 2013	905 456-0783 x 243 tel 905 456-1172 fax	5:30 pm Sikhs 7:30 pm Sikhs
Scarborough	March 21, 2013	<b>Winning Research</b> 10 Milner Business Ct Suite 900	5:30 pm Tamils 7:30 pm Tamils
	March 26, 2013	<b>Toronto</b> , ON M1B 3C6 416-754-0009	5:30 pm Sinhalese 7:30 pm Sinhalese
Toronto	March 27, 2013	<b>Consumer Vision</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, 2 Bloor Street, West	5:30 pm Jewish 7:30 pm Jewish
	March 28, 2013	<b>Toronto</b> , ON M5W 3E2 416 967 1596 tel 416 967 0915 fax	5:30 pm Palestinian/Arab 7:30 pm Palestinians/Arab



### Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from *The Strategic Counsel*, a national market research company. As part of the market research that we conduct, we often hold discussion groups where about 8 people get together to talk about their opinions on a variety of topics.

We are conducting one of these groups in the next couple of weeks and I wanted to know if you are interested in participating. We are looking for people from different ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds, and we will be talking about your experiences living in Canada. You would be paid \$150 for your attendance but I want to assure you, we are not selling anything. Your input at this discussion group would provide us with valuable input. If you are interested in participating, I will need to verify your eligibility by asking you a few questions.

1. First, do you or does anyone in your household work in... (READ LIST)?

A market research company or market research department in a company	<b>Thank and end</b>
A Marketing firm	<b>Thank and end</b>
An advertising company	<b>Thank and end</b>
Any media such as television, radio or a newspaper or magazine	<b>Thank and end</b>
A public relations company	<b>Thank and end</b>

2. Are you a resident of Canada?

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	Yes	Continue
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	No	Thank and end interview
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup>	Don't know	Thank and end interview

3. Were you born in Canada?

Yes

No

IF NOT BORN IN CANADA:

4. How old were you when you moved to Canada?

\_\_\_\_\_ years



IF BORN IN CANADA:

5. Were one or both of your parents born in Canada?

No (CONTINUE)  
Yes, one (CONTINUE)  
Yes, both (THANK AND END)

\*RECRUIT A MIX OF 1<sup>st</sup> GEN, 1.5 GEN and 2<sup>nd</sup> GEN

1<sup>st</sup> Gen = Not born in Canada; moved to Canada as an adult (18+)

1.5 Gen = Not born in Canada; moved to Canada as a child (Younger than 18)

2<sup>nd</sup> Gen = One or both parents not born in Canada

IF NOT BORN IN CANADA:

- 6a. Where were you born?

IF BORN IN CANADA:

- 6b. Sometimes our ethnic or national backgrounds make us think of ourselves not only as Canadian but as related to one of Canada's many ethnic groups. In addition to Canadian, what is your main ethnicity or place of origin?

IF BACKGROUND IN SRI LANKAN:

7. For this group we are interested in speaking to people from various ethnic backgrounds. Do you identify as Sinhalese or Tamil?

IF YES, QUALIFIES  
IF NO, THANK AND END

IF BACKGROUND IS INDIAN:

8. For this group we are interested in speaking to people from various cultural or religious backgrounds. What is your religion or faith tradition, if any?

IF SIKH OR HINDU, QUALIFIES



IF BACKGROUND IS ISRAELI:

9. What is your religion or faith tradition, if any?

IF JEWISH, QUALIFIES

\* THE ISRAELI/JEWISH GROUP WILL INCLUDE A MIX OF PARTICIPANTS WHO WERE BORN IN ISRAEL OR HAVE A CONNECTION TO ISRAEL (approx. 4) AND RESPONDENTS WHO ARE JEWISH BUT HAVE NO BIRTH CONNECTION TO ISRAEL (approx. 4)

IF BACKGROUND IS PALESTINIAN, SYRIAN, LEBANESE, JORDANESE OR EGYPTIAN:

10. What is your religion or faith tradition, if any?

\* THE PALESTINIAN OR ARAB GROUP CAN INCLUDE PARTICIPANTS FROM SYRIA, LEBANON, JORDAN AND EGYPT (BUT MUST BE 50% PALESTINIAN BACKGROUND, AND MIX OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN). THE IDEAL MIX IS:

Palestinian and Muslim (2)  
Palestinian and Christian (2)  
Syrian (1)  
Lebanese (1)  
Jordanian (1)  
Egyptian (1)

ASK ALL:

11. People in many countries and/or regions around the world have been affected by historical, recent or on-going tensions or violent conflicts between groups divided along ethnic, cultural and/or political lines.

Based on what you may have read, seen or experienced, how much or little do you know about...

FOR HINDUS AND SIKHS:

a) Conflict between Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab and/or elsewhere in India

FOR TAMILS AND SINHALESE:

b) Conflict in Sri Lanka

FOR ISRAELIS/JEWS AND PALESTINIANS/ARABS:

c) Conflict in Israel/Palestine

Nothing at all (THANK AND END)  
A little  
A fair amount  
A great deal



ASK ALL:

12. Do you have a personal, family or community-based connection to this conflict?

Yes

No (THANK AND END)

FOR HINDUS AND SIKHS:

a) Conflict between Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab and/or elsewhere in India

FOR TAMILS AND SINHALESE:

b) Conflict in Sri Lanka

FOR ISRAELIS/JEWS AND PALESTINIANS/ARABS:

c) Conflict in Israel/Palestine

Nothing at all (THANK AND END)

A little

A fair amount

A great deal

13. This focus group discussion is being undertaken by the Mosaic Institute, a registered Canadian charitable organization. The discussion is being held among members of the (INSERT COMMUNITY: “Indo-Hindu” or “Sikh” or “Tamil” or “Sinhalese” or “Jewish” or “Arab”) community in Canada. The purpose of the group is to understand your views and experiences in terms of how this conflict might have an impact on your life here in Canada.

Are you interested in participating in a discussion like this?

Yes

No (THANK AND END)

For the following two questions, can you tell me if you think each statement describes you or does not describe you? The first is...

14. My friends would say I’m very comfortable expressing my opinions in a group.

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	Describes	CONTINUE
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	Does not describe	THANK AND END

15. I tend to be kind of person who enjoys talking about important issues with other people.

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup>	Describes	CONTINUE
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup>	Does not describe	THANK AND END



16. Can you give me three uses for a newspaper besides the obvious?

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**PLEASE ENSURE THE FOLLOWING:**

50/50 GENDER SPLIT  
MIX BY AGE

I would like to invite you to the group discussion. In appreciation for your attendance, you will receive \$150. The discussion will last about two hours and will be held on (provide date, time, and location).

**RECRUITER NOTE: RECRUIT 9 PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH GROUP.**

**Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Telephone# :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Business Telephone # :** \_\_\_\_\_

We will be calling to verify the information given and will confirm this appointment the day or evening before.

If you do not hear from us, your appointment to attend the discussion is not confirmed. If we have been unable to contact you, please telephone us at \_\_\_\_\_

We request that you arrive at least ten minutes prior to the discussion so that we can begin on schedule. Thank you.





## Appendix C – Discussion guide

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### I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Welcome
- Confidentiality
- No right or wrong answers
- Honest/Straightforward
- First names/occupation/hobbies
- If appropriate: where were you born? IF BORN OUTSIDE OF CANADA: How long have you been in Canada?

As you may have been able to tell from our call asking you to participate this evening, I'm interested in talking to you about issues affecting your communities at home or in those countries from which you or your family come.

### II. Description of the Conflict

As we indicated, we are interested in your perspectives on conflicts or tensions that may exist or have existed in the past between different groups in your home country or the country to which you or your family are connected.

How would you describe the conflict between groups that originate from this country – that is, the place to which you or your family are connected?

How would you describe these tensions or conflicts?

ASK EACH PARTICIPANT TO DESCRIBE THE CONFLICT.

Probe for:

- specific type of conflict
- origin of conflict
- ethnic/cultural/religious causes of the conflict(s)
- status of the conflict today



### **III. Personal Experience of the Conflict**

I know that some of you were born in Canada and some were born in other countries where conflicts have occurred. Regardless of your place of birth, can you tell me how you personally have experienced the tension or conflict that you have just described?

How has the tension or conflict affected you personally?

Probe for:

- direct experience of the conflict
- family experience
- regional experience within the country where conflict occurred
- implications of the conflict while growing up

Were you affected by the tension or conflict as a child? How? Can you describe what the conflict meant to you as a child or as a young person? How did it affect you? How did it affect your family? How did it affect your relationship with others within your community? How did affect you growing up?

Does the tension or conflict continue to have an affect on you and your family? How?

If you were to encapsulate the most relevant component of the tension or conflict today, what would it be? In other words, what is it about it that continues to be most at issue among those who have been involved in it or have had an historical connection to it?

### **IV. Experience of the Tension/Conflict in Canada**

For those of you who were born outside of Canada, how important was the tension or conflict in bringing you and your family to Canada? Did the conflict or tension play a role in your family's decision to immigrate to Canada?

What about for those of you who were born in Canada? Did the tension or conflict play a role in your family's decision to immigrate to Canada? How? What role did it play?

You have all now lived in Canada for some period of time. How does the conflict from home affect you in your lives in Canada? How?

Is it something that you continue to follow? Is it an important part of the life of your community here in Canada? Why or why not?



How has your view or perception of the tension or conflict changed during your time in Canada?

Is it something that continues to be important in your life?

Is it something that has become less important to you as you live your lives in Canada?

Is the shared experience of the tension or conflict – either directly in the country where it has occurred or from Canada – important to your ethnic community here in Canada today? How?

Do you interact with those from the ‘other side’ of the tension or conflict that now live here in Canada?

How would you describe your interaction, if any, with those from the ‘other side’ of the tension or conflict who now live in Canada? Do you have friends or colleagues or neighbours who would come from the other side? What is your perspective on them? Is it different as a result of being in Canada? Why? How?

How has your perception of the tension or conflict changed, if at all, as you view it from the perspective of Canada?

How does your ethnic community in Canada view the tension or conflict today? Would you say that your ethnic community shares a perspective on the conflict or are there differing views of the conflict among those of a similar background?

IF DIFFERENCES: What are the differences? Why do these persist?

Are you involved in activities that are related to the tensions or conflicts from your places of origin? In other words, do you have an active involvement in support of your ‘side’ of the conflict?

What types of activities are you involved in?

Probe for:

- specific activities (demonstrations, protests, contact with government/lobbying, fundraising activities, membership in specific groups, etc.)

Do you foresee a continued involvement in these types of activities?



Are others in your ethnic community involved in these types of activities? From your perspective, do you see an on-going need for these types of activities? Why or why not?

## **V. The Role of the Government of Canada**

What role has the government of Canada played in dealing with the tension/conflict? Is it a role that you support?

As far as you know, has the government taken a position on the tension or conflict? What is its position/policy? Is it a position that you support? Why or why not?

What is the appropriate role for government in dealing with the tension/conflict?

Does the government have a role to play on the international stage in finding ways to resolve the tension/conflict in the country where it occurred/continues? Ideally, what role should the government be playing?

Does the government have a role to play here in Canada when it comes to the tension/conflict? What role do you think the government should have?

Should the government be consulting with Canadians who have a direct link to the conflict – on either side of the conflict? Why? What do you expect the government to do, if it consults with those living in Canada who represent both sides of the conflict? Are there things that the government of Canada can do to address the conflict here in Canada? What kinds of things? What can it do to address the conflict in the country where it has occurred?

## **VI. The Canadian Perspective**

All of you have now lived in Canada for some time.

For those of you who have come to Canada from elsewhere, to what extent do you consider yourself to have developed a Canadian perspective in the time that you have lived here?

Has being in Canada affected your perception of the conflict? How?

If you had to offer a view on the tension/conflict that we have talked about this evening, do you think it is a conflict that will be resolved? Why or why not? How will it be resolved?

Do you think that Canada can be helpful in the resolution of this conflict? How?

Thank and terminate.