



CANADA

**HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES
PRESENTATION OF PETITION
June 10, 1999**

THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby-Douglas, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions this morning. The first petition has been signed by residents of my constituency of Burnaby-Douglas as well as communities across Canada.

The petitioners, members of the Humanist Association of Canada and others, seek changes to the preamble to Canada's constitution and to the charter of rights. They wish to remove the reference to the supremacy of God in the preamble and to change the wording of the charter of rights to reflect the fact that Canada is a secular country which respects the deeply held views of people of many different religious faiths as well as those who have no religious beliefs.

SVEND J ROBINSON, MP
BURNABY-DOUGLAS

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RESPONSE TO PETITION RÉPONSE À LA PÉTITION

PREPARE IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH MARKING "TEXT" AND "TRANSLATION"
PRÉPARER EN ANGLAIS ET EN FRANÇAIS INSCRIVANT "TEXTE" ET "TRADUCTION"

PETITION NO. BY/DE
361-2552 Mr. Robinson

DATE: June 8, 1999
Received by HAC November 02, 1999

RESPONSE BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA
RÉPONSE PAR LA MINISTRE DE LA JUSTICE ET
PROCUREURE GÉNÉRALE DU CANADA



SIGNATURE
MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
MINISTRE DU SECRÉTAIRE PARLEMENTAIRE

SUBJECT/SUJET

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

RESPONSE/ RÉPONSE

TEXT X TRANSLATION
TEXTE TRADUCTION

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* provides protections for all Canadians, whatever their background or beliefs. Key *Charter* provisions ensure that this is so. Sub-section 2(a) of the *Charter* expressly protects freedom of conscience and religion as one of the fundamental freedoms, which includes non-religious and minority religious beliefs. Section 15 of the *Charter* guarantees every individual the right to equality. Section 27 provides for the interpretation of the *Charter* in a manner that is consistent with the multicultural heritage of Canadians. The preamble of the *Charter* must be read in this context. In fact, the courts have made it clear that the preamble must be read consistently with freedom of conscience, and cannot take away from this freedom. Thus, freedom of conscience including the freedom to hold non-religious beliefs is protected by the Constitution.

Canadians hold a wide variety of beliefs, and the courts have made it clear that accommodating these beliefs is an important principle guiding the interpretation of the *Charter*. In this context, there are no plans to bring amendments to the preamble of the *Charter*.