

CoHNA Conducts Civic Workshop Around Hindu Safety With Montreal Police

'Suraksha' session at Centre Sanaaq went ahead with support from 40 allies standing against anti-Hindu hate

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Montreal's Hindu community gathered for a civic-education workshop on combating Hinduphobia and reporting hate crimes, overcoming calls for its [cancellation](#). The event opened to a full house—with support from Montreal police who reaffirmed their commitment to protecting all communities, the Centre Sanaaq which stood firm and hosted the session, and the nearly 40 organizations who upheld the values of pluralism and the lived experiences of Canada's minority Hindu community.



Marc Bellerose of Montreal Police Hate Crimes Unit speaks at CoHNA's Suraksha workshop on combating Hinduphobia.

Suraksha: A National Effort to Empower Communities

The event, titled "Suraksha: Combating Hinduphobia, Addressing Hate Crimes," was organized by the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA) in collaboration with the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM). Suraksha (which means 'safety' in Sanskrit) is CoHNA's branded series of civic-education workshops designed to empower Hindus to recognize, report, and respond to hate crimes.

This initiative has become timely amid growing anti-Hindu hate in Canada. Statistics Canada has reported a dramatic rise in hate crimes targeting South Asians, a demographic that is majority Hindu. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue reported a 1,350% surge in anti-South Asian slurs on X between 2023 and 2024. The NCRI Rutgers study on anti-Hindu disinformation warned of harmful memes and slurs being seeded by extremist networks, noting that such online rhetoric often precedes real-world violence.

Earlier Suraksha sessions were held in Toronto and Calgary, with more planned across the country. Through Suraksha, CoHNA is building a model of collaboration between law enforcement and local Hindu communities, and invites Hindu communities nationwide to reach out if they would like to host a workshop in their city in partnership with local police.

What the Community Learned

The Montreal session featured a detailed presentation by Marc Bellerose of the SPVM Hate Crimes Unit (Module des incidents et des crimes haineux – MICH), who outlined the history of the unit and its unique mandate to protect Montreal's diverse communities.

Key takeaways for participants included:

- Record and Report: Victims and witnesses should always document incidents and file a report. Officers are duty-bound to record it.
- Act quickly: Surveillance footage is often erased within 72 hours. Timely reporting ensures critical evidence is preserved.
- Active witness role: Bystanders play a vital part in documenting hate incidents and supporting victims.
- Classification is not up to the officer: Frontline staff can not decide whether something is “really” a prosecutable hate crime (or a hate incident: which is not a crime but can still be hateful). That determination comes later in the process.

SPVM affirmed that it has a full-time hate crime and hate incident unit which regroups specialized investigators and advisors. “This allows the module to develop more in-depth expertise, gain an overall view of current issues, and offer a more personalized approach with each community. The MICH also collaborates with various cultural communities or organizations through such informative events as the present one. The SPVM would like to remind all that it is committed to impartially and objectively protecting all the citizens of Montreal.”

Attempt to Cancel Event Leads to Community Pushback

Opposition groups had questioned the need for such workshops and said that concerns about Hinduphobia were “non-existent”. CoHNA's Hindu civic engagement was also described as “Hindutva” and “foreign interference.”

Alarmed by these attempts to cancel the event, more than 40 diverse organizations, spanning, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and civic allies, came together in just 24 hours, to support CoHNA's efforts to educate for Hindu dignity and safety. They signed a joint [letter of solidarity](#) which stated that:

- Hinduphobia is a lived reality in Canada, as seen in repeated [vandalism of temples](#), violent attacks on Hindus, and open calls for Hindus to “leave Canada.”
- Ignoring this lived experience emboldens perpetrators and silences victims.

—Attempts to portray CoHNA and other Hindu groups as “foreign fronts for India” or “Hindutva” proxies are a form of Hinduphobia that risk framing an entire community as outsiders in their own country.

—Hindu Canadians are diverse with roots in the Caribbean, Africa, and across South Asia; many others are Canadian-born. Portraying them as a foreign monolithic group tied to one foreign state is harmful.

As Shawn Binda, Hindu educator and member of CoHNA’s Advisory Council, explained: “For a second-generation Hindu, born in Canada with roots in the Caribbean, it is painful to be accused of being a front for the Indian government simply for being proudly and publicly Hindu. The opposition to what should have been a simple civic education event revealed the lengths to which some activist groups will go to fight against Hindus. These attacks only highlight why it is important to recognize and name Hinduphobia, also known as anti-Hindu hatred, in Canada.”

—Excluding Hindus from civic spaces, like Centre Sanaaq, that are available to other religious groups, undermines Canada’s principles of equality and fairness.

CoHNA Canada president Rishabh Saraswat noted that SAWCC’s rhetoric mirrors a broader pattern of dismissal. “Attempts to dismiss Hinduphobia or paint Hindus as outsiders are themselves a form of bigotry. Our community has the same right as others to safety, dignity, and civic voice. The past few days have underscored the power and importance of grassroots advocacy. Far from silencing us, the opposition to this event galvanized support and underscored the urgent need for Hindus to equip themselves with knowledge and tools to report hate.”

For more details, see CoHNA’s fact sheet and full report: cohna.org/denying-hinduphobia.

About CoHNA

CoHNA is a grassroots-level advocacy and civil rights organization dedicated to improving the understanding of Hinduism in North America by working on matters related to the Hindu community and by educating the public about Hindu heritage and tradition. For more information, please visit <https://cohna.org>

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