

WE CAN FIGHT BACK AGAINST THOSE WHO HATE

STAND UP TO TO THOSE WHO WOULD DIVIDE AND DIMINISH, SAYS DEFAMED BUSINESSMAN MOHAMAD FAKIH



FAKIH Column

A recent court decision is a victory for all Canadians who value tolerance and inclusivity - and want to live in a country in which those who spread hatred are held to account.

A judge of the Ontario Superior Court ruled (May 13) that I was defamed by

Kevin Johnston, who used his hate-speech website to describe me - and the customers who eat at my restaurants - as "jihadists" who are "up to something nefarious."

The judge described Johnston's claims as "a loathsome example of hate speech at its worst, targeting people solely because of their religion."

When we read the news these days, it can feel as though the bad guys are winning.

Hate has always been with us. But lately, the people who hate have grown louder and bolder. They have emerged from the dark corners of the internet. They feel safe to announce - even to celebrate - their intolerance.

Any Muslim knows prejudice. As does any

black man or woman. Any Jew. Any Hindu. Any minority. But today, we feel it and experience it more.

Sometimes when I get upset, I listen to the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. I like being reminded that there are people whose dreams are not for their own success or achievement - but for the betterment of all.

The words of King serve as a reminder: It is not enough for any of us to remain silent in our condemnation of bigotry. In the face of hate, silence is like a wink. It says: "I'm fine with what you're doing. Go ahead and push the boundaries a little bit more."

To triumph over hate, we need a steady gaze and a firm spine. Most important, we need to stand up and speak out - we all need

to stand up and speak out - against those who seek to divide and diminish us. That's why it was so important to me to file this defamation suit and follow it to completion.

No country is perfect in its history. Canada has turned away Jews. It has turned away Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. It has discriminated against blacks, Asians and others. It has subjected Indigenous children to a system of widespread abuse. These are dark moments of intolerance or indifference.

Yet Canada has grown. We have acknowledged and learned from our mistakes. To those living amid violence or persecution, Canada has appeared as a beacon of hope and harmony.

As other countries close themselves off to the world, we can open our doors wider - to welcome new members of the Canadian family.

The American dream is about the self, the individual. It's about striving for riches and the comforts they bring. Even the symbol of the dream - the white picket fence - is about separating some people from others.

What should be the Canadian dream?

It should be a dream for us all, not only for ourselves. It should recognize

that Canada works best when its people work and live together in community and respect.

There will always be people who hate from their bones. But together we can make them smaller in number, smaller in influence, smaller and smaller until they all but disappear.

That is my Canadian dream. And I hope it is yours.

Mohamad Fakh is the CEO of Paramount Fine Foods and chair of the Fakh Foundation.