

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Canada, is a registered not-for-profit Canadian organization with a mission to educate Hindu community and share/ promote pluralistic values of Dharmic (India based religions) among all Canadian residents. Founded more than 30 years ago, VHP Canada has been involved in various dharmic cultural and community activities for many years.

The VHP team has learnt about an unfortunate decision being planned by the City of London - that of banning (or severely limiting) backyard fireworks. We understand that some vested anti-Hindu / Hinduphobic groups have been pushing for such a ban with an aim to cause cultural and religious impact to many Dharmic peace loving communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists.

Even the Option B being considered will impact the populations (especially children) from the above communities, and turn our important festivals like Diwali and Bandi Chorr Divas into a set of drab celebrations, minus the vibrancy, cheer and joyousness.

For the above mentioned multi religious communities in London, it also means

- Denying them a very important ritual in a family setting that is an integral part of our festivals like Diwali and Bandi Chorr from time immemorial. Diwali is the most important religious festival of these communities similar to Christmas for Christians around the world
- Denying young Londoners growing up the memories of a joyous festival at home
- Eventually erase this ritual for good, for a family centric festival

Those who are pushing for Option B are completely ignoring the impact of such curbs on family celebrations at home or the fact that for people without the language, advocacy skills, single families and low income families, it would be near impossible to navigate the bureaucracy and afford the costs of getting a backyard fireworks permit.

It will be a massive loss to our Canadian values (of preserving and cherishing diversity & inclusion) if we were to erase away traditions and rituals with a single stroke of a pen or a vote, at the behest of vested interests or a well organized vocal minority.

We want to share that either a ban or restriction will impact the City of London's long standing commitments to honor and preserve cultural traditions and diversity in our city.

In consultations with members of Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist communities we have heard loud and clear about their commitment to uphold the safety & well-being of London city and its inhabitants and to educate all members about responsible and safe firework usage and participate in the cleanup efforts after the celebrations.

We sincerely hope that the city of London will not take any action to unnecessarily penalize a large and growing portion of its Dharmic population.

Sincerely,

The Board of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Canada
(World Hindu Council)