

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

## **Rethinking Secularism: The Next Stage in the Debate over Pluralism?**

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### **Summary**

This paper explores the changing nature of pluralism and secularism in modern Quebec. The author begins by considering the various definitions of pluralism: as a description of moral and cultural diversity, for instance, and as a model for integration, as exemplified in policies such as multiculturalism. In recent decades, social justice has emerged as a key element of pluralism – that is, that fairness form a central consideration in managing relationships between majorities and minorities. This concept is widely known as reasonable accommodation. The paper examines Quebec's specific experience with the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. The Commission, established in 2007, represents an important chapter in the province's unique history of pluralism and secularism. During a series of public forums reported widely in the popular media, the Commission listened to Quebecers' views on what constitutes reasonable accommodation. The author believes that the Commission will help inspire the need to focus on the end goal of pluralism based on social justice, rather than on solely religious neutrality and the separation of church and state.