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Uneasy alliance with PQ; Ignatieff pushes for religious tolerance, Jan. 21

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The failure of Stephen Harper's Conservative party to condemn the banning of the Sikh kirpan from the Quebec National Assembly building reminds us that almost by definition, the human rights of minorities are vulnerable when parties are in search of majorities in and around election time.

As a former Quebecer and a former Ontario human rights commissioner, I am dismayed that issues of accommodation of religious symbols and observance that were amicably resolved elsewhere in Canada and at the federal level 20 years ago have been allowed to fester in Quebec to the point where the official opposition is emboldened to call into question the concept of multiculturalism itself.

Ottawa's refusal to defend the importance of human rights and multiculturalism as Canadian values leaves the government in an uneasy alliance with the Parti Québécois in devaluing "les votes ethniques."

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