



March 24, 2026

Briefing Note

Motion MM39.43 – Raising of the Lion and Sun Flag

Overview

This note provides factual and historical context regarding the Lion and Sun flag in relation to Motion MM39.43, including clarification of certain issues that have arisen in public discussions.

1. The Lion and Sun Symbol Is a Historical and Cultural Emblem, Not Anti-Religious

The Lion and Sun emblem is a centuries-old symbol of Iran's national identity, whose meaning has evolved across different historical periods and political contexts.

Leading historian of Iran, Professor Abbas Amanat (Yale University), has extensively examined the development of this emblem in works such as *Pivot of the Universe* (1997), *Iran: A Modern History* (2017), and *Iran Facing Others* (2012). His scholarship provides important context for understanding the symbol's nature.

Amanat demonstrates that the Lion and Sun emerged as a composite and evolving emblem, shaped particularly during the Safavid and Qajar periods. It brought together multiple layers of meaning without being reducible to any single ideological or doctrinal interpretation.

It is also worth noting that, in certain historical interpretations, elements of the symbol—such as the lion bearing a sword—have been associated with motifs connected to Shia Islamic tradition. While these interpretations are not definitive or exclusive, they further reinforce a simple point: the symbol cannot reasonably be characterized as anti-Islamic.

Accordingly, the Lion and Sun flag reflects a shared historical and cultural identity that transcends religious and political divides.





2. Not a Symbol of War, but of National Identity and Civil Aspirations

The Lion and Sun flag has been prominently displayed in peaceful demonstrations advocating for human rights, democracy, and dignity. It is not a symbol of geopolitical alignment or military advocacy, but rather a marker of national identity and solidarity.

As articulated by Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the leader of the Iranian opposition, Iranians are a peace-loving people, and the primary source of conflict and instability lies with the Islamic Republic. This is a position that has been continuously supported by various Canadian governments.

Accordingly, the Lion and Sun flag cannot reasonably be characterized as a pro-war symbol. It represents a civil and national aspiration for freedom, dignity, and self-determination.

3. A National Symbol Beyond Political Appropriation

The Lion and Sun symbol is not the property of any single political movement or ideology, but rather an enduring element of Iran's historical identity.

At various points, even the Islamic Republic itself has attempted to appropriate or lay claim to this symbol, including through public statements by senior officials asserting that it forms part of Iran's national heritage and should be formally recognized at the international level¹.

At the same time, the symbol continues to appear across historical sites, cultural references, and even religious spaces such as mosques, reflecting its deep and continuous presence in Iranian society across different eras.

Taken together, these realities underscore a broader and important point:

The Lion and Sun transcends political systems, factions, and regimes—it belongs to the historical and cultural identity of the Iranian nation itself.

4. Context of the Motion

The Iranian-Canadian community has, in recent years, mobilized in response to events of profound human significance. Following the events of January this year, in which many Iranian

¹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-lion-and-sun-flag/33674127.html>





protesters lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom and dignity² large numbers of people across the diaspora have rallied around shared symbols of national identity, including the Lion and Sun.³

In Toronto, this has been reflected in unprecedented, large-scale, and peaceful demonstrations, widely recognized—including by law enforcement—as exemplary in their organization, civility, and commitment to democratic values.

In this context, the raising of the Lion and Sun flag is not a routine or symbolic act in the ordinary sense. It is a gesture of recognition and tribute:

- To those who have lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom and democracy
- To the resilience of the Iranian-Canadian community
- To the broader values of peaceful civic engagement that Toronto seeks to uphold

Accordingly, this context provides a clear and compelling basis for the motion.

Conclusion

The Lion and Sun flag is best understood as:

- A historic national symbol of Iran;
- A culturally inclusive emblem across diverse traditions;
- A peaceful expression of identity and solidarity among Iranian-Canadians;

This context may assist in assessing Motion MM39.43 and addressing concerns that have been raised.

Respectfully,
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² <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202601255198>

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/iran-support-rally-toronto-february-14-2026-9.7090479>

