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Quebec mayor fights order to remove crucifix

by Ron Csillag by Religion News Service

TORONTO -- The mayor of a Quebec town says he will appeal a decision by a human rights tribunal that bans prayer at city council and ordered him to remove a crucifix from the council's chambers.

Saguenay Mayor Jean Tremblay said he will refuse to heed the judgment from the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal that also ordered him to remove a Sacred Heart statue.

The tribunal ordered the town to pay \$30,000 in damages to the local resident who complained about the religious symbols, ruling they infringed on his freedom of conscience. The town is roughly 90 percent Catholic.

Tremblay has set up a toll-free telephone line and posted a link on the town's website to solicit donations for his legal battle.

"Why is it us Christians that always have to bend?" Tremblay told the *Globe and Mail* newspaper. "Our values have no importance. I am the first mayor in the history of the world to be punished for reciting a prayer."

The tribunal's decision is widely viewed as the latest step toward Quebec's aggressive march toward secularism. Earlier this month, provincial lawmakers voted to ban ceremonial Sikh daggers, known as kirpans, from the legislature.

In December, Quebec banned the teaching of religion in publicly subsidized daycare facilities.

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