

Immigration Lawyers, Practitioners and Academics Tell New Canadians and anyone concerned with our immigration system why they should not support the Conservative Party:

In a press release today, leading immigration lawyers, practitioners and academics refuted the arguments of the Conservative Government that their policies have been favourable to New Canadians. They noted that the Conservative Party has been telling visible minority immigrant communities, which it calls the "ethnic vote", that it is improving the immigration system. A review of their record shows the contrary.

-Since the Conservative Party took power, the total time for processing sponsorship applications and visa applications for parents and grandparents has increased dramatically. Meanwhile the number granted visas annually has dropped by 44% since 2006. This year only 11, 500 visas will be issued in this category. New Canadians who hope to be reunited in Canada with their parents or grandparents, or who have any empathy for families that want to be reunited, should vote for another party.

-The backlog of skilled worker applicants waiting for a decision has gone up from 487,000 in 2005 to 508,000.

-What is actually being done to process any type of application remains a guessing game for many applicants.

-The Conservative Party has cut settlement funding for immigrants and refused to fund many well-established groups, often because of political considerations.

-The Conservatives claim they will get tough on human smugglers, but the law they intend to pass mainly punishes refugees. Even women and children will be imprisoned for a minimum of one year under this law.

-The Conservative Party claims to be sympathetic to refugees who do not flee their countries illegally, but just announced plans to cancel the only program allowing Canada to protect refugees applying from within their country.

-The Conservative Party plans to make marriage sponsorships conditional on a two-year waiting period. Canadians and their spouses will be subjected to more uncertainty and delay. Spouses in abusive relationships will be trapped in them.

-The Conservative Party has continually stirred up anti-immigrant sentiment to justify its policies, even without a majority.

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Why the “Ethnic” Communities Should Not Support the Conservative Party:

Despite the media hype and government propaganda, Canadian immigration experts, both academics and lawyers, do not think that the Conservative government is doing immigrant communities any favours.

Stephen Harper, Jason Kenney and the Conservatives have targeted the so-called "ethnic vote," hoping to convince immigrant communities that the Conservatives have made things better for their communities and that these communities should support them. However, a review of the facts shows that this government's policies have not been friendly to immigrant communities. Moreover, the Conservative government has made a habit of using immigration issues to stir up anti-immigrant sentiments amongst other Canadians.

FACTS:

1. Since the Conservative Party took power, the processing time of visa applications for parents and grandparents has increased dramatically. Jason Kenney tries to manipulate the statistics to suggest that the contrary is true but the facts speak for themselves. The number of parent and grandparent visas issued in 2006, based on the 2005 targets, was 20,005. The number of visas for parents and grandparents that will be issued this year is 11,200, a reduction of almost 9,000 or close to 44 per cent. The total processing time of a sponsorship of a parent application including the time for the processing of the sponsorship in Canada and the processing of the application overseas has increased between nine and thirty months depending on the visa post. Moreover, given that the number of visas issued is being reduced, the backlogs will increase and the processing times will increase. The failure of the government to address this issue is creating immense hardship on immigrant families.
2. The Conservative Government has cut settlement funding for immigrants and has refused to fund many well established groups. Moreover, as is well known, the government decides funding applications based on political considerations, providing funding to those groups that support them and denying funding to those that do not. In December, the Harper government cut \$53 million from the 2011-12 budget for programs that offer support and integration services for new Canadians. This was not a rebalancing between provinces, this was a 10% cut to the overall budget before any reallocation occurred. In addition to a \$43 million cut in Ontario, British Columbia was slashed by 8% or \$8.5 million and Nova Scotia has been cut as well. The Conservatives have also held back more than \$200 million of promised settlement funding for Ontario during the last 5 years - before the cuts were made.
3. Despite claims that the Conservative government cut the backlog of skilled workers, the backlog that was 487,000 in 2005 and is now 508,000. The overall backlog has grown by 173,000 on the Conservative's watch. Thus despite all their claims to being good managers, they have failed to make any

significant improvements in the skilled worker program in content or efficiency.

4. The Conservative Government promises it will get tough on human smugglers. However, instead of punishing the smugglers the bill targets the victims of smuggling, the refugees. The bill will require **mandatory** detention of all persons who arrive by boat for one year—**including women and children**. They would also deny permanent residence – and family reunification -- to recognized refugees for five years for no reason other than their mode of arrival. The Conservatives have made their claim that they are getting tough on human smugglers a cornerstone of their re-election strategy. However, the policy has nothing to do with smugglers and has everything to do with demonizing and reducing the numbers of refugees. After all the government has also proposed to eliminate the category of refugees who can be considered for refugee status by applying from their home countries.

5. The Conservative government proposes to make it harder for spouses to reunite **by introducing conditional visas for a period of two years from landing..** Jason Kenney claims that the government is targeting ‘marriage fraud’ but don’t be fooled – every couple will face additional, harsher, longer and more invasive scrutiny. The more cynical visa officers have had their cynicism encouraged by Mr. Kenney. Just because you know your marriage is genuine, doesn’t mean the government will agree, and even more individuals, families and communities will suffer as a result of the government’s culture of suspicion. If a visa officer does deny a family sponsorship application, there will be a delay of several years before an appeal can be decided, further delaying family reunification. **And those marriages entered into in good faith that fail within the two years conditional period will be suspect, causing many spouses to remain in potentially abusive relationships.**

As academics and lawyers and other practitioners who specialize in immigration law and human rights, we are firmly committed to basic Canadian values of equality and respect for all Canadians, regardless of country of origin. We believe that the rule of law should not be undermined by political ideology. We value the wealth and wisdom of our multi-cultural society and understand that we will thrive as a country by cultivating our common Canadian qualities and not by exploiting our differences for partisan gain.

If you believe in the concept of family reunification, that is the ability of immigrants and Canadians to bring their parents, grandparents, children and spouses to Canada; if you believe in a fair and timely skilled worker program that recruits the best and the brightest from around the world to join our midst; if you believe in

justice for refugees without automatic imprisonment; if you believe in spousal sponsorship processing that does not lead to the potential for greater spousal abuse and neglect, then you should not support the Conservative Party in the upcoming Federal Election on May 2nd.

SIGNATURES

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