

November 7, 2005

Hon. Joseph Volpe, PC, MP
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Re: Refugee Appeal System

Dear Minister:

We write to express our great disappointment regarding your decision not to implement the Refugee Appeal Division at this time. This decision contradicts the express will of Parliamentarians, and contravenes the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. We write to respectfully urge you to reconsider your decision and fulfill your government's promise to implement the much-needed Refugee Appeal Division.

Every institution, including Canada's refugee system, is prone to errors. Consequently, safeguards to catch and correct these errors are vital, especially where human lives are at stake. Without a genuine, merit-based appeal system to reassess the facts submitted in support of claims, our refugee system allows vulnerable refugees to fall through the cracks, rejecting them in error and returning them to a situation where they may face grave human rights abuses, even death.

Without the Refugee Appeal Division very little can be done to remedy a situation once a bad decision is made. And bad decisions are made. That is why the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) guaranteed the right to a merit-based appeal for refugee claimants whose claims were denied. Your decision not to implement this appeal division effectively denies them that right and contravenes the Act.

Our refugee program must, in the first instance, be about saving lives and offering protection to the displaced and persecuted. As such, Canada must treat genuine refugees with fairness and compassion. This requires an effective and transparent, just and compassionate refugee determination system in Canada that includes reforms, beginning with the implementation of a merit-based appeal mechanism. So we urge you to reconsider your decision, and implement the Appeal Division.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is the Canadian association of Evangelicals. Since 1964 the EFC has gathered Christians together to foster understanding and promote collaboration for greater effectiveness in ministry and public witness. The EFC affiliates include evangelical congregations, denominations and ministry organizations, who uphold a common statement of

faith. It is an active participant in the World Evangelical Alliance. Our affiliates include some 40 denominations and over 7000 churches. It is estimated that 1.5 million Canadians are members of affiliated churches and organizations. Some of the EFC's affiliated denominations are Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders with the Canadian government; others are active in providing assistance to refugees and other newcomers to Canada in various ways.

Last year, the EFC formed the Refugee Ministry Network under the leadership of Anne Woolger. Woolger is the Founder and Director of the Matthew House, a shelter for refugee claimants, in Toronto, and has worked with refugees for over 16 years. The Network aims to stimulate strategic initiatives among Canadian churches and to facilitate more effective assistance for refugees in Canada and around the world. The EFC's concern about the refugee system is informed by this network within Canada and naturally your recent decision is causing grave indignation across the country among refugee serving groups within the EFC network.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham
Director of Law and Public Policy
The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

Anne Woolger
Chair, Refugee Ministry Network Canada
The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada