

# REFUGEE LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Media Release

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## **Groups dismayed over politicization of appointments to Immigration and Refugee Board**

Montreal - Organizations concerned with refugees and immigrants expressed alarm today over the government's politicization of the appointments process for members of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), which has led to serious threats to the stability and integrity of the Board.

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), Refugee Lawyers Association (RLA), Association québécoise des avocats et avocates en droit d'immigration (AQAADI), Ontario Bar Association (OBA) (Immigration Section) and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) are seriously disturbed by the move to stack the IRB Selection Committee with appointees of the Minister. This pushes the appointments process towards a more politicized and potentially ideologically-driven process.

"Over the past year the government has failed to support the process for providing timely, merit-based appointments to the IRB – something that is essential to ensure fast and fair decision-making for refugees and immigrants," said Elizabeth McWeeny, CCR President. "Now the government is introducing changes to the process that interfere with the goal of achieving merit-based, non-partisan appointments to the IRB."

The government released a report yesterday, commissioned by the previous Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on appointments to the IRB. The key recommendation calls for the Minister to appoint half of the members of the Selection Committee. This opens the door to political control of a selection committee that should be solely focused on recommending the best candidates for the important job of deciding refugee claims and immigration appeals. Similar concerns have been raised about the changes introduced by the current government to the process for appointing judges.

Last Friday, the IRB chairperson, Jean-Guy Fleury, a career civil servant, unexpectedly announced his resignation. He has been recognized to have been struggling, unsuccessfully, to work with the government to achieve merit-based appointments in a timely fashion. Currently 52 out of 156 IRB positions are vacant, leading to growing backlogs at the IRB. We understand that some 50 candidates have been identified through the existing appointments process that can fill the vacant positions, but appointments have been stalled by the government.

With the sudden departure of the chairperson, the IRB is facing a vacuum of leadership with the positions of Chair, Vice-Chair and Executive Director vacant or about to become vacant. There are concerns about who the government will appoint in these important positions, particularly given the comments of the Prime Minister about making judicial appointments to forward a particular political agenda.

Ever since the creation of the IRB, there has been criticism of political patronage appointments. In recent years there have been welcome steps taken to depoliticize the appointments process and base appointments on merit. Current developments represent a step backward after hard-fought efforts to depoliticize a Board that deals with making life-and-death decisions about human lives.

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**The Refugee Lawyers Association** of Ontario is an association of lawyers in the Province of Ontario in Canada advocating on behalf of refugees. Website: [www.rlaontario.com](http://www.rlaontario.com)

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