



Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons, Ottawa ON K1A 0A6
May 13, 2019

Dear Members of CIIM

We write today to express our dismay and strong disagreement with the proposed changes in government refugee policy, namely the inclusion in Bill C97 of significant amendments to IRPA. Bridges Not Borders – Créons des ponts is a grassroots refugee support group in the Hemmingford area that gives support to refugees and shares information on refugees via our website, local activities and the media. Every week we go to Roxham Road USA to greet people before they cross, giving them warm clothing in winter. We have met with many elected officials including a parliamentary secretary, MPs and MNAs to express our views about the need for Canada to remain open to those seeking refuge here and that the USA cannot be considered a safe country for asylum seekers.

These amendments will strip refugee claimants who arrive irregularly of the right to a hearing before the IRB if they have made a claim for asylum in another country, notably the USA. And this includes people who have simply entered a claim without any decision being rendered. It is estimated that 2000 people a year would be affected. Instead of an oral hearing before an independent IRB member, where they have a lawyer and an opportunity to put their case and question evidence presented, they will only be offered access to the PRRA, a notably inferior paper-only process conducted by an immigration officer with limited training. The success rate for PRRA is extremely low. It is shocking and deeply undemocratic that such a fundamental change should be included in an Omnibus bill without proper debate in Parliament. This change will likely result in legal challenges as it conflicts with the landmark 1985 Singh Judgement of the Supreme Court which guarantees access to a hearing.

The constant degradation of and attacks on the asylum system in the US carried out by President Trump's xenophobic and anti-refugee administration are pushing asylum seekers in the US to seek refuge here because they have good reason to fear they will not be protected there. On April 6, speaking to the Republican Jewish Coalition, President Trump mocked asylum seekers at the southern border and called the system a 'scam' saying he wants to get rid of it altogether. What clearer indication could there be of an administration which lacks compassion and understanding of the terrible experiences that push people to flee their countries?

Our refugee determination system is promoted as a model by UNHCR, and the proposed changes mark a stark reversal in the government policy and principles. Last year's government budget stated that all those seeking asylum "*must be treated with compassion and afforded due process under Canadian and international law, and in keeping with our values as an open and welcoming country.*" The proposed changes will do the opposite by putting refugee claimants at grave risk of being returned to countries where their life, liberty and safety are threatened.

We urge you to consider the extremely serious implications of these amendments and to vote against them. They are incompatible with Canadian and international law and with the values that Canadian society has upheld.

Sincerely

Wendy Ayotte, Grace Bubeck and Frances Ravensbergen

Coordinating Committee

Bridges Not Borders - Créons des ponts

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CC: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

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Michelle Rempel, MP

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& Members of CIIN