

February 11, 2014

Canadians Call on Minister of Immigration to Celebrate Family Day By Strengthening Family Class Reunification

A coalition of community based organizations and academics across Canada are calling on the Hon. Chris Alexander, the Federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to mark Family Day by making a commitment to strengthen the family class immigration program.

Up until the early 1990s, Canada had a world renowned family reunification program which saw family class immigrants make up the majority of immigration to Canada each year. Over the last two decades, the proportion of family class immigrants gradually declined, and is currently allowed less than a quarter of the total immigration intake.

Further restrictions to family class sponsorship were introduced by the previous Minister of Immigration. These changes, which took effect on January 2, 2014, are making it much more difficult for Canadians to be reunited with their parents and grandparents.

Community organizations of the “My Canada Includes All Families” Campaign recently wrote to the new Minister of Immigration, asking him to increase the number of family class immigrants intake each year, lower the income requirement for sponsorship, and broaden the definition of family members who can be sponsored.

“Family class immigrants of all ages and backgrounds contribute significantly to the economic, social and cultural advancement of Canada. They form the backbone of our communities and their presence allows their families to flourish. Canada as a whole is better off because of the sacrifices all of our parents and grandparents make to keep our families strong,” said the coalition in its letter to the Minister.

“The changes to family class immigration which took effect on January 1, 2014 vis-à-vis the sponsorship of parents and grandparents are making it much more difficult for Canadians to be reunited with their loved ones. Moreover, these changes have a disproportionate negative impact on women, refugees, and other marginalized communities who are now facing greater challenges in meeting the hardened financial eligibility for sponsors,” the letter continued.

SALCO finds that “exclusion of low-income immigrants from family reunification, effectively punishing those who are already struggling.”

SALCO's mandate is to provide access to justice for low- income South Asians in the Greater Toronto area in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner. As a specialty clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario, SALCO provides advice, brief services and/or legal representation in various areas of poverty law.

In addition to casework, SALCO's mandate also includes public legal education, law reform initiatives, community development, and test case work. SALCO is a national leader on the issue of forced marriage and is actively involved in law reform and legal education on forced marriage, honor based violence, and family/partner violence in South Asian Community. SALCO provides expert evidence through Canada on South Asian specific issues and has intervened at the provincial, federal and Supreme Court Canada on issues of racism, freedom of religion, and family violence amongst other things.

Also, SALCO's goal is to make access to justice a reality for marginalized low-income South Asians in Ontario by advocating on their behalf in regards to various legal issues.

SALCO's advocacy goals include providing a strong position on legal issues in media, government, and community groups to address the gaps not only in access to justice, but in justice itself.

As Canadians in many provinces are getting ready to celebrate Family Day and other mid-February holidays, the Campaign calls on all Canadians to contact the Minister of Immigration as well as their local Member of Parliament to ask for their renewed commitment to family sponsorship by reversing the newly-introduced changes.

The letter to the Minister has been endorsed by the following organizations: Canadian Arab Federation, Canadian Council for Refugees, Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists Ontario Chapter, Colour of Poverty/Colour of Change, FCJ Refugee Centre, Metro Toronto Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, Migrante Canada, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario and YWCA Canada.

For more information, please contact:

Deepa Mattoo

Staff Lawyer/ Acting Executive Director
SALCO
416-487-6371 ext 43