

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister  
Centre Block (HOC)  
111 Wellington St, Room 313S, Floor 3  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Hon. Maxime Bernier  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Lester B. Pearson Bldg., A-10  
125 Sussex Dr.  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2  
15 October 2007

Hon. Stockwell Day,  
Minister of Public Safety  
West Block (HOC)  
111 Wellington St, Room 491, Floor 4  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

October 19, 2007

Dear Prime Minister Harper, Minister Day, and Minister Bernier,

We request your urgent resolution of the scandalous situation of United States citizens Medea Benjamin and Colonel Ann Wright (Ret.) – highly respected peace advocates - denied entry into Canada on October 3, 2007, after being detained several hours by Canadian border police in Niagara Falls.

We wish to advise that the undersigned Members of Parliament have invited Medea Benjamin and Col. Ann Wright (Ret.) to meet with legislators and representatives of civil society here in Ottawa on October 25, 2007. We trust that you will ensure unimpeded entry into Canada, to enable Ms. Benjamin and Colonel Wright to share their message of peace with Members of Parliament, and the broader community.

Ms Benjamin is co-founder of Code Pink, a respected American women's peace organization. Ret. Colonel Wright provided 31 years of distinguished service in the US Army, followed by a 14 year career in the US diplomatic corps.

These women were barred from Canada after their non-violent civil disobedience in opposition to the war in Iraq resulted in their names being placed on a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. This FBI list, submitted to foreign governments, is used to identify and control the entry of US citizens into other countries. Col. Wright was told by the presiding Canadian Immigration officer that "persons placed by the FBI on the NCIC database were considered, solely because they are on the list, to be criminals by the Canadian government," no matter that the offence was a misdemeanor in the United States. Ms Benjamin and Ret. Colonel Wright both travel extensively in their work and have never encountered such barriers elsewhere.

New Democrats are deeply concerned that Canadian border police are enforcing rules determined not by our own Canadian government, but by the FBI and other US security agencies. Canada has a deserved reputation for championing the civil and political rights of citizens throughout the world, often against strenuous objections by governments under whose authority these citizens live. Advocates for Peace and devotees of democratic opposition to government policy - like Ms Benjamin and Col. Wright - should be welcome in Canada.

.../2

The refusal of entry to these respected advocates of peace is abhorrent in its own right. However, their case is representative of a broader threat to any and all citizens of the US, Canada and other countries who would hold their governments to account through peaceful demonstration, protest, and passive resistance. Canada's policy contributes to the repression of peaceful and democratic dissent, insofar as it establishes real consequences for US citizens charged with misdemeanor offenses for legitimate peaceful protest. One must ask: under Canada's current policy, would Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. be blocked at the Canadian border, because they constituted threats to our national security? Foreign government 'watch lists' should not form the basis for automatically denying entry into Canada of US citizens, or any other nationals. Government policies, not the individuals who opposed them, often present the greater threat to democracy, security and freedom.

Border security is a critical aspect of protecting our sovereignty, and ensuring the security of Canadians. However, your government's wholesale adoption of the FBI's NCIC database unreasonably restricts the movement of innocent, indeed outstanding, American citizens. Canadian officials must exercise greater scrutiny and care when determining threats to Canadian security. Decisions cannot be made by foreign databases alone. Rather, border officials must be given a clearer and broader set of criteria against which they might independently adjudicate individual cases for refusal of entry, and against which their decisions can be reasonably contested, and defended.

We seek your immediate assurances that Ms. Benjamin and Col. Wright's travel to Ottawa will not be impeded when they come next week to discuss issues of mutual concern with Canadian Parliamentarians and the broader community. We would welcome your attendance at this event, and we request your urgent response.

Sincerely,



Penny Priddy, MP  
NDP Public Safety Critic



Olivia Chow, MP  
NDP Citizenship & Immigration Critic



Libby Davies, MP  
NDP House Leader



Paul Dewar, MP  
Foreign Affairs Critic



Alexa McDonough, MP  
NDP Peace Advocate and International  
Development Critic



Dawn Black, MP  
NDP Defence Critic