

Liberal Party of Canada
81 Metcalfe Street, Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M8

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Debbie Douglas
Executive Director
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
110 Eglinton Ave., W
Toronto, ON M4R 1A3

Dear Ms. Douglas,

Enclosed, please find the Liberal Party response to your questionnaire.

For more information on the Liberal Party of Canada's vision for Canada, please take a moment to review our platform online at www.liberal.ca. This document provides details on Liberal goals and priorities.

On behalf of our Leader, Stéphane Dion, and the entire Liberal team, thank you for writing to identify the major concerns of your membership. We appreciate your interest in the Liberal Party's policies as they relate to the issues which affect you.

Sincerely,

Doug Ferguson, President
Liberal Party of Canada



**A Liberal Response to the
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
Questions for Federal Election 2008**

Immigrant Settlement and Integration

Investment in the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), and additional national investment in immigrant settlement have served to support better settlement and integration outcomes for immigrants arriving in Ontario. While COIA was signed in November 2005, it is only now that immigrants are starting to realize its benefits. It is helping to improve access to language training, assist immigrants with immediate and long-term settlement challenges, and address systemic barriers to settlement faced by women, youth and seniors.

- 1. Will you commit to an annual investment of at least \$320 million, the amount allocated to the last year of the five year Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), and sustain at least the current level of national investment in immigrant settlement?**

In 2005, the previous Liberal government signed the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, and allocated \$920 million to implement the objectives and initiatives outlined in the agreement.

A Liberal new government would ensure that the full \$920 million commitment would be honoured. We would not fall behind on the payments made to Ontario, like the Conservative government in 2007 when they withheld \$100 million in critical settlement and integration funding.

Labour Market Integration

National investment in Labour Market Agreements (LMA) with the provinces have served to improve access to skills training opportunities and labour market integration for those who do not qualify for Employment Insurance (EI). The LMA between the governments of Canada and Ontario is worth approximately \$1.2 billion over six years. It specifically targets groups under-represented among those eligible for EI, including immigrants. These investments have the potential to support economic integration for immigrants, but only if they are sustained and if the funds are allocated to meet these needs of under-represented groups.

- 2. Will you commit to sustaining the \$1.2 billion over six years investment in the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement, and ensure that those funds are actually allocated to improving the employment situation of immigrants and other under-represented groups?**

The Liberal Party of Canada has a proud tradition of assisting new Canadians and the underprivileged. The former Liberal government signed in 2005 the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Partnership agreements, investing \$1.36 billion over 6 years to support labour market

integration of recent immigrants; literacy skills; workplace skills development; assistance for Aboriginal Canadians; and assistance for older workers, displaced workers, and people with disabilities. We will continue to strongly support initiatives that assist workers have access to effective employment programs and services; and employers find the skilled workers required to sustain and enhance economic growth for Canada.

Immigration

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) became law on 28 June 2002. Since that time, two different governments have failed to implement the Refugee Appeals Division contained in the legislation, despite making a promise that they would do so. The lack of appeal puts Canada at risk of violating the rights of asylum seekers by sending them back to face persecution after an incorrect decision.

Canada is increasingly relying on temporary migrant labour to fill labour market needs. Research by the Alberta Federation of Labour has shown that this has created a vulnerable pool of disposable workers, subject to exploitation by employers. The number of temporary work permits approved by the Canadian government has increased dramatically over the last five years. The new Canadian Experience Class allows only some, but not all temporary foreign workers to apply for permanent resident status.

At the same time the backlog in family sponsorship applications has not been reduced. Applicants from countries in the global south are over-represented among those who face the longest wait times.

These and other systemic barriers in Canada's immigration legislation, policies and practices have contributed to creating a growing population with less than full resident status. These immigrants are often full participants in our economy and are part of our communities. Because of their precarious status, they have few rights and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

3. What will you do to ensure immediate implementation of the Refugee Appeal Division, as required by the IRPA?

Canada's refugee determination system is one of the best in the world, and we have been leaders in recognizing the protection of needs of vulnerable groups, including women and children.

The Liberal Party of Canada is proud of that achievement, and we will continue to work to ensure that Canada remains a safe destination for those facing life and death situations.

A Liberal government would be open to discussions with stakeholders concerning considerations for refugees arriving in Canada.

4. What will you do to ensure that all temporary foreign workers in Canada have the immediate opportunity to be eligible for permanent residence status?

Canada must actively recruit those who best meet Canada's labour market needs, because our economic prosperity depends on it.

Temporary workers who choose to remain in Canada represent an important source of highly qualified people – an attractive pool of skilled labour that Canadian employers will need to remain competitive in the future.

That is why, in 2005, we allocated \$700 million to address the backlog and create a new In-Canada Economic Stream. The introduction of this stream was expected to lead to approximately 5,000 additional foreign students, and 11,000 temporary foreign workers, including their dependents, applying for permanent residents status per year. Unfortunately, the Conservative government immediately cancelled this funding upon forming government.

A Liberal government would work with the provinces, territories, and other partners to ensure that foreign workers in Canada have the opportunity to remain in Canada if they qualify

5. What will you do to reduce the backlog and delays in processing family sponsorship applications?

As per our response to question 4, the previous Liberal government made investments to address the backlog – investments the Conservative government has cancelled.

Unlike the Conservative government's recent exclusionary plan to reduce the backlog by cherry picking the kinds of newcomers it wants to bring to Canada and closing the door on the others, the Liberal Party of Canada believes that implementing long-term and sustainable solutions to reduce the backlog is the right track to take.

6. What will you do to improve the situation of people without status in Canada?

A Liberal government would be open to discussions with stakeholders concerning considerations for people without status in Canada.

Racialization of Poverty

Recent research and Census data show that immigrants tend to be underemployed, earn less than their Canadian-born counterparts and experience high levels of contingent employment. Immigrants and refugees from racialized communities experience higher levels of poverty than their Canadian-born counterparts. Research also shows that members of racialized communities, including those born in Canada are over-represented among Canada's poor.

7. How will your party address the problem of the increasing racialization of poverty and high levels of poverty among immigrants, particularly those from racialized communities?

The Liberal Party of Canada is the only party with a realistic plan to reduce poverty for the most vulnerable members of our society.

In November 2007, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion unveiled the Liberal 30-50 Plan to Reduce Poverty; a plan to dramatically reduce the number Canadians living below the poverty line by 30 per cent and cut in half the number of children living in poverty in five years.

The plan includes:

- a Making Work Pay Benefit to lower the welfare wall;
- an improved Canada Child Tax Benefit and taking the Child Tax Credit into a refundable credit so that those who do not pay taxes also receive the benefit;
- an increased and improved Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments for the lowest income seniors.

The Liberal Party will work with provinces, territories, cities, and NGOs in the fight against poverty and to achieve real improvements in affordable housing, universal child care, public transit, and labour market training.

Stéphane Dion's vision of a fairer Canada is guided by the principle that our country will be made stronger if all Canadians are able to fully participate in our society.

Human Rights

The Anti-Terrorism Act passed in December 2001 has been identified by many groups as having a negative impact on Canadian society. In particular, these groups are concerned that the Act has resulted in increased racial profiling of Muslims and Arabs, more stringent immigration laws, and has had a serious impact on privacy and individual rights and freedoms. Canada's security-certificate proceedings have been used to arbitrarily detain and deny a fair hearing to individuals subject to this measure, primarily those who are Muslim and Arab.

In 2006, the Government of Canada severely reduced investment in Status of Women Canada, including closing down several offices across the country. While this raises serious questions about Canada's commitment to supporting the full participation and equality of women in Canadian society, the greatest impact has been felt by equity-seeking groups including women from racialized communities and women with disabilities.

The Court Challenges Program (CCP) established in 1994 supported equity-seeking groups to exercise rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The

program was cancelled in 2006. The CCP has been frequently cited by the Canadian Government as a demonstration of meeting its commitment under the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). A court challenges program was created in June 2008 as the result of a negotiated settlement with minority official-language communities. The new program focuses on linguistic rights. Other groups named in the Charter have no recourse in their efforts to access and enforce their rights.

Early this year, Canada withdrew from supporting and participating in the 2009 Durban Review Conference, including denying support to non-governmental groups to participate. The Conference is organized by the UN Human Rights Council, and is a follow-up to the World Conference Against Racism held in 2001 in Durban, South Africa. This action calls into serious question Canada's commitment to anti-racism and in meeting its obligations under CERD and other international human rights conventions.

8. What will you do to demonstrate a renewed commitment to human rights and anti-racism?

The Liberal Party has always been and will continue to be a strong voice for human rights and against racism.

Earlier this year, Liberals were instrumental in making critical changes to the security certificates process so that the rights of foreign nationals and permanent residents are better protected and the national security of all Canadians was strengthened.

In addition, Liberals ensured that important safeguards were added to the new Anti-Terrorism legislation. These important changes included the right to retain and instruct counsel for any person ordered to attend an investigative hearing.

9. What will you do to ensure that Canada, and civil society representatives such as non-governmental organizations are able to participate effectively at the Durban Review Conference 2009?

Liberals support the government's decision to withdraw from the preparatory meetings for the 2009 Durban conference. While the 2001 conference purported to be against racism, it became instead a vehicle to promote extreme forms of anti-Semitism, effectively distracting from any legitimate discussion of ethnic tensions in the Middle East. Early indications are that the 2009 conference will be no better. Liberals, however, believe the decision not to participate in Durban II should not be an excuse for Canadian silence on the issue of racism. Canada must set out an alternative course, trying to bring together international partners in a different forum. We must continue to strongly advocate against racism, and convene a formal process to set out a course of action to fight. Canada must also continue to fund UN efforts at combating racism.