



## Canadian rights groups decry limited Parliamentary Committee hearings for Bill C-51, proposed major national security reforms

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Rights groups across Canada reacted with alarm and deep concern to the news that the government has brought forward a motion limiting study of Bill C-51, the *Anti-Terrorism Act, 2015*, by the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to only four sessions of two hours each. With the first session devoted to government witnesses, including the Minister of Public Safety, this would leave only six hours for all other potential experts.

Amnesty International Canada, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Muslim Lawyers Association, the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, La Ligue des Droits et Libertés and the National Council of Canadian Muslims all called on the government to withdraw the motion and agree to a schedule of extensive hearings that will ensure that all relevant expertise and perspectives across the country is available to the Committee during the course of its study of Bill C-51.

"Canadians are being told they should embrace Bill C-51 without question because it will make us safer. Overlooked is that this Bill contains deeply worrying challenges to human rights protection, including the unprecedented proposition of empowering Federal Court judges to authorize violations of the Charter of Rights. To cut short the opportunity for these enormously consequential changes to be thoroughly examined is itself a grave human rights concern." Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada (English Branch)

"The Committee needs not only to examine what is in the Bill, but what is not in the Bill. It has become clear that a majority of Canadians, including four former Prime Ministers, are deeply concerned that there is no proposal in Bill C-51 to strengthen oversight and review of national security agencies. That critical issue cannot be considered in any meaningful way under this truncated schedule." Carmen Cheung, Senior Counsel, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

“This is the most significant overhaul of Canadian laws dealing with national security since 2001. At that time there were 19 sessions in Committee allowing 80 expert witnesses to be heard. It has come forward without any accompanying review of existing laws, policies and resources and an analysis of where they fall short. To allow such little time for scrutiny of its provisions runs counter to the expectation Canadians have that their elected representatives will consider legislation carefully before it is adopted.” Sukanya Pillay, General Counsel and Executive Director, Canadian Civil Liberties Association

“Already, lawyers across Canada have raised serious concerns about Bill C-51's compatibility with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and with the rule of law. Cutting back on the time for the Committee to study those concerns and hopefully rectify those deeply problematic aspects of the Bill leaves open instead the prospect of years of time-consuming and expensive court challenges after the fact.” Ziyaad Mia, Canadian Muslim Lawyers Association

“Our coalition is made up of 41 organizations across the country. They come from many different sectors and have, over the course of many years, developed varied expertise in a range of issues with respect to national security and civil liberties. They are ready to share that input with MPs and have a legitimate expectation that they should be able to do so. Many will have no opportunity to do so with so little time on offer.” Roch Tassé, National Coordinator, International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group

“Bill C-51 is complex and very technical legislation that proposes two entirely new statutes and extensive amendments to three others. Each of those should receive thorough consideration. Four two-hour sessions of Committee study will not even begin to offer MPs an opportunity to grapple with and understand its implications.” Nicole Filion, Coordonnatrice de la Ligue des droits et libertés

Bill C-51 should be of concern to all Canadians as it has the potential to impact on all of our rights given its stunningly far-reaching definitions of what constitutes a threat to Canada's security. As we have learned from past and recent experiences, without robust oversight, review and redress mechanisms security agencies have abused the powers ceded to them. Given the disproportionate impact of anti-terrorism legislation in recent years on Canadian Muslims, these new proposals are of particular interest in our community. Such limited time for study by the Committee offers scant opportunity for those views to be meaningfully shared with Parliamentarians.” Ihsaan Gardee, Executive Director, National Council of Canadian Muslims