



For immediate release
January 30, 2015

Harper's new anti-terrorism bill is overreaching and could impact negatively on the rights and freedoms of Canadians

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group is deeply concerned by several provisions of the latest Harper's government's anti-terrorism bill, tabled Friday in the House of Commons, including: the lowering of the threshold for making preventative arrests and obtaining a peace bond and the extension of the period of time recognizance conditions can apply; the expansion of criteria to prevent an individual from boarding a plane, without the need for a judicial warrant; and provisions that will criminalize "advocating" or "promoting" the commission of terrorism offenses.

The ICLMG is especially concerned that these additional powers awarded to security agencies are not paired with an increase in the existing oversight regime that is already deficient. "Existing measures have already led to serious violations of the rights of innocent people and the government now wants to introduce new measures notwithstanding the fact that it has not yet implemented the necessary oversight and review mechanisms to protect Canadians", says Roch Tassé, ICLMG National Coordinator. "The measures introduced in Bill C-51 greatly increase the potential for further national security abuses. Before introducing such drastic new measures, the government needs to demonstrate that existing legislation is insufficient and must implement the type of robust and comprehensive oversight and review mechanisms proposed by Justice O'Connor who presided over the Arar Inquiry, as well as create opportunities for greater parliamentary oversight", adds Tassé.

The ICLMG is also worried about the introduction of a new criminal offense for 'advocating' or 'promoting' the commission of a terrorism act. "These are terms that can be interpreted very subjectively and have the potential to impact on freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press and academic freedom", says Dominique Peschard, ICLMG co-chair. "For instance, it could shut down a critical debate on the 'root causes' of terrorism. It is a very dangerous fine line to walk if one values freedom of opinion and freedom of expression in a free and democratic society."

Given the serious implications and the potential overreach of the proposed legislation, ICLMG urges the government to allow for serious debate and thorough consideration of the bill and calls for extended and wide-ranging consultations in public parliamentary committee hearings.

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