

SÉNAT



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*L'honorable Céline Hervieux-Payette, c.p.  
(Bedford, Québec)*

*The Honourable Céline Hervieux-Payette, P.C.  
(Bedford, Quebec)*

CANADA

Ottawa, July 17, 2009

My dear Mexican friends,

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who leads Canada's minority Reform-Conservative government, has just imposed a visa requirement on Mexican visitors, in order to limit the number of Mexican refugee claimants in Canada.

On behalf of the Canadians who do not support their government's extreme-right policies (including a majority of the members of the Parliament of Canada), I want to say how deeply I regret this decision and to apologize for it.

A visa requirement is entirely unacceptable. It erects an intolerable administrative wall between our two countries.

First, because the Government of Canada has not provided the services that handle immigration applications and refugee claims with the resources they need in order to adapt to the volume of perfectly legitimate demands.

Second, because Mexico, as a member of NAFTA, is one of Canada's major economic partners and it is unacceptable to slam the door in a partner's face.

Last, because Canada has a tradition of dealing with applications for immigration and asylum in a humane manner. Pursuant to its international commitments, and as a signatory to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Canada has every year allowed about 10% of new arrivals to Canada to be taken from the refugee category. This has risen as high as 25% when urgent international situations so required.

Unfortunately, ever since its election in 2006, Canada's minority Reform-Conservative government has ceaselessly undermined Canada's reputation abroad. In the name of its extreme-right ideology, its partisan, campaign-style decisions and demagoguery have rapidly spilled over our borders, tarnishing our country's image more and more every year.

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I am sure that this decision will prove to be only a blip in our bilateral relations. Rest assured that the vast majority of Canadians welcome you to Canada.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Céline Hervieux-Payette".

The Honourable Céline Hervieux-Payette, PC  
Senator

Former president and founding member of the Interparliamentary Forum of the Americas