

## More criminals allowed into Canada

### 600 convicted of serious crimes get special permits

**Tom Blackwell**  
National Post

*Tuesday, November 05, 2002*

Growing numbers of criminals, suspected terrorists and war criminals were allowed into Canada last year on special permits issued by the federal government.

Among those admitted were more than 600 people convicted of a serious crime here or abroad and 11 people who authorities believe engaged in "terrorism, espionage or subversion by force."

All were granted permits by the Immigration Minister that let them enter Canada, despite having backgrounds that normally would keep them out.

A spokeswoman for Citizenship and Immigration Canada said each permit was thoroughly reviewed, issued on compassionate or national-interest grounds, and deemed not to be a security threat.

Many could have been Americans with distant criminal pasts on their way to Alaskan cruises, or veteran guerrillas invited to take part in international talks, said the official.

But one security expert said he fears at least some of the permits were granted to people who should be kept out of Canada at all costs, if only as a matter of principle.

"If we are supposed to be against war crimes, if we are supposed to be against the use of child soldiers ... then we should at least be sticking to principles by restricting travel to Canada by people who are involved in causes that do these things," said John Thompson of the Mackenzie Institute, a security think-tank.

"I haven't really heard of any major international peace conferences [in Canada] but I have heard of some insurgent groups staging their own propaganda lectures here, in their own community."

Mr. Thompson said he suspects permits are meted out in part to insurgent movements with whom the federal government has, or had, some sympathy, such as the Tamil Tigers and some Middle Eastern groups.

Sergio Karas, a veteran Toronto immigration lawyer, said the statistics raise serious questions, especially regarding the top officials of regimes guilty of war crimes and terrorism.

"What kind of social good could there be by allowing them to enter Canada?" he asked.

Susan Scarlett, of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, said there is nothing to fear from those who come in on the permits, noting most have been screened by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

"The decision to issue a permit is only made ... after it has been determined that the health and the safety and the security of Canadians are not at risk," she said. "Every application is considered very carefully."

The permits are issued for limited periods to people who ordinarily would not be allowed into Canada on various grounds.

Figures just released by the department reveal that 606 people convicted of a serious crime here, or believed to have committed one abroad, got permits in 2001, up from 464 in 2000 and 377 in 1999.

The 11 suspected of having taken part in terrorism, espionage or forcible subversion represented an increase from two the year before and one in 1999.

One person whom authorities believe may still engage in terrorism or espionage got a minister's permit, down from nine in 2000.

Ten senior officials of governments that engaged in terrorism, human rights violations, war crimes or crimes against humanity received permits to enter Canada, up from two the year before and zero in 1999. Permits also went to two people suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity outside Canada.

The typical person allowed in with a criminal conviction served their sentence long ago, perhaps a touring rock star with a distant drug conviction, Ms. Scarlett said.

The criminal numbers might have increased last year because of ex-con Americans who got permits to travel to Vancouver and pick up one of the increasingly popular cruise ships headed for Alaska, she said. Others might be admitted to attend funerals or for some other compassionate reason, she added.

Those with terrorist or war-crimes backgrounds are typically given access to Canada to attend peace talks, take part in international conferences or sign treaties, Ms. Scarlett said.

The figures generally are miniscule, given that there are 200 million trips by people in and out of Canada every year, she said.

Privacy legislation prevents the government from releasing any details of the minister's permits, Ms. Scarlett said.

But Mr. Thompson said such details should be divulged, if only for the sake of immigrants who may have been victims of the war criminals or other permit holders in some other country.

#### SPECIAL PERMITS:

People issued special permits by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to enter Canada included:

##### Category of immigrant:

Persons who have been convicted in Canada of a serious offence or for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe they have been convicted of a serious offence outside Canada

2000: 464

2001: 606

##### Category of immigrant:

Persons for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe they may engage in terrorism, espionage or subversion by force

2000: 9

2001: 1

##### Category of immigrant:

Persons for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe they have engaged in terrorism, espionage subversion by force

2000: 2

2001: 11

Category of immigrant:

Persons for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe they have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity

2000: 1

2001: 2

Category of immigrant:

Senior officials of a government that engaged in terrorism, human rights violations, war crimes or crimes against humanity

2000: 2

2001: 10

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, National Post

tblackwell@nationalpost.com

© Copyright 2002 National Post

CLOSE WINDOW