

BRIEF TO THE COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**YOUSSEF « JOSEPH » ZAKHOUR
Member in Good standing of the ICCRC
Membership # R421983
MIDI Registered Member # 11148**

Submitted via e-mail to the clerk of the committee

Laval, Quebec - May 27, 2017

My name is Youssef Zakhour AKA Joseph. I am a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC) and a member of the “Registre des consultants au Quebec”

I am in the immigration industry since 1978. I worked as a Locally Engaged Staff LES in three different Canadian missions in the Middle East. I started my employment in October 1973 as an administrative assistant at the Canadian Embassy in Beirut and moved to the visa section in 1978

In March 1977, I was one of the Beirut Embassy staff hostages taken by the famous Lebanese-Canadian citizen Eddy Haimour. In February 1984, during the military fall of the city of Beirut in the hands of a local militia, I was obliged to sleep six nights on the floor of the embassy until escorted with other staff by the Italian army! Those two major incidents are amongst many others that I lived during my service for the Canadian government in the Middle East.

Below is an elaboration of some personal **details that I believe useful to present the case of several former immigration officers like me, now members of the immigration consultant’s community and all the other members** that enrich the profession by their education and expertise they carried from other fields.

Between 1978 and 1984, I was a receptionist and as a registry clerk at the visa section at the Canadian Embassy in Beirut. In 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, I worked with a Canada based staff on his first posting abroad at a sub-office in East Beirut. Our main duties were to help evacuating Canadians and other foreigners from Lebanon and to interview visas applicants. Because of the civil war in Lebanon, the Canadian government closed the Beirut visa section in July 1984 and moved it to Amman-Jordan, where I was posted as an Immigration program officer IPO until transferred to the Canadian Embassy in Damascus-Syria in December 1985 to open a new visa section. In January 1989, I attended my first IPO training course in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. In August 1995, I was again transferred from Damascus to Beirut to re-open the visa section. In January 1997, I attended the Designated Immigration Officer training course in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal and I passed the related exam successfully.

Are Regulated Immigration Consultants all incompetent?

During the course of the hearings we have heard a lot of heresy and terrible stories of abuse by “Consultants”. All adversary statements accused the consultants in general! A distinction must be clearly made between the regulated consultants and the “unscrupulous” individuals. In some countries those “unscrupulous” called themselves lawyers too! Should we blame all lawyers because of some “unscrupulous” individuals calling themselves lawyers? For sure we shouldn’t. The same applies to the consultants. People in third world countries are vulnerable and don’t differentiate between lawyer, regulated consultant or “Fake” practitioner.

During my employment at the visas sections, I assessed hundreds of applications from different categories. The wealth of experience that my colleagues, the former immigration officers, and I have gained from our employment at the visas sections cannot be obtained elsewhere!

My experience enabled me to be an active member in my profession. I have been a Director at the CAPIC Quebec chapter between 2004 and 2012. In November 2012, I became the acting President of the CAPIC Quebec Chapter until elected a Director at ICCRC in November 2013. I served my mandate between November 2013 and November 2015.

I was a subject matter expert to write entry exam questions with the first regulator CSIC in 2005 and with the ICCRC in 2012.

Between 2013 and 2017, amongst hundreds of immigration applicants, I represented around forty inland refugee claimants from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon in front of the IRB. I had only one refugee refused who was accepted later on H&C grounds. My success is due to the selection of my cases and to the professional submission of my files!

Since 2013, I started promoting the Refugee Sponsorship program with the MIDI staff to different religious communities in Montreal by giving presentations. I was able to help two organizations to bring at least 400 Syrian refugees. To practice in Quebec, RCIC must also comply with the provincial requirements. Over 300 RCICs are registered with "MIDI"

Since 2014, I offered several presentations on the Refugee program to the Syrian community at the local radio station 1450am.ca program yamal-cham. I made three trips to Beirut between 2014 and 2016 to prepare Syrian refugees for their interview at the embassy. I also gave two interviews on the refugees subject at Radio Canada International last January. The introduction of all my interviews and presentations always started by "Who might represent you"

I also participated at the Canadian Museum history project to archive the immigration of the Syrian Refugees.

Because I feel that I should give back what the profession gave me; I am still volunteering since 2014 with the TCRI "Table de Concertation au service des Réfugiés et des Immigrants" and participate in most of the refugees events held by the Canadian Council for refugees.

I have worked with many NGOs, but I am sorry to say that I have rarely seen a lawyer volunteering for those organizations. Should this allow us to call lawyers not human? Never. Being human has nothing to do with the title neither with the profession nor with the number of pages of the regulations governing any profession.

ICCRC

ICCRC is a six years old self-regulating profession! A lot of accomplishments have been done in educating and controlling members and protecting the public. ICCRC has very qualified teachers offering free PME courses. The Complaint and discipline committee is doing what the Canadian law enables to do with regulated consultants

only. The management and the board of directors are still working hard to improve the regulations of the profession. Did they fail? Never. Could they do better? Of course, they could. Are they competent to do it? Yes indeed.

However, the creation of the ICCRC didn't suit the detractors (anti-consultant lawyers and dissatisfied inexperienced consultants) who are taking advantage to attack the ICCRC at any occasion. They believe that once ICCRC disappeared they could control the whole immigration industry! Unfortunately, this is not true.

The focus during the hearings was made on negativity only and no one realized what might happen if the profession is abolished? Could the lawyers handle the business of 4000 consultants? Could the lawyers substitute the consultants inside and outside Canada?

My expectation in the case the profession is abolished, will be the following:

- Flourish of illegal immigration business. This would be the best gift ever offered to the "Unscrupulous" individuals inside and outside Canada.
- Over 4000 Canadian families will lose their income!
- Over 100,000 immigration applicants per year will lose their legal assistance.
- Several NGO will lose qualified volunteers.
- The immigration system will lose the main promoter.

In my opinion, the RCICs are not a risk for the immigration system but the "unscrupulous" individuals. By error some people named the "Ghosts" as "Ghost consultants" instead of "Ghosts practitioners" or "unscrupulous individuals" Definitely, those individuals don't belong to our profession. We are fighting them everywhere and we urge the Canadian authorities to intervene as soon as possible.

Consultants versus Lawyers:

The RCICs are immigration specialists practicing in some areas of the law. The countries covered by the RCICs are usually not covered by the lawyers! I recruit clients from countries in the Middle where lawyers don't go, especially when people need help! Just to name few countries like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and others.

The only risk for the immigration system comes from the "unscrupulous individuals" only. The ICCRC has no jurisdiction to enforce law on "Ghosts", unfortunately. Therefore, the ICCRC shouldn't be responsible for their acts! One might ask why Law Societies who do have the jurisdiction don't go after Ghosts?

Suggestions:

The main three areas look to be the most important to strength the ICCRC mission:

- Regulate the immigration consultants by the federal statute.

- Increase the education standards and entry requirements to practice consultation, which decreases the complaints from consumers about immigration consultants' competencies and the quality of service.

- Providing sufficient resources to the CBSA to pursue "unscrupulous" individuals case by case and not the major ones only.

The RCICs promote Canada and participate in the prosperity of the economy of the country by selecting the best immigrants. Like most of the RCICs who tirelessly have given and still give their time and efforts to this profession, I wish that my years of service be crowned by the appreciation of the public and the Canadian society.

Thank you for reading me,

Joseph Zakhour, RCIC R421983