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Good day Honourable Members of the Committee,

RE: Submission to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration – High Rate of Visa Refusals from African Applicants

I am Agnes Aigbinode, CEO and founder of Virtue Educational and Allied Services (hereinafter, "Virtue"). Virtue is a registered corporation in Canada whose primary mandate is to support international students, especially students of African descent, in their dreams of studying and/or working in Canada. To this end, Virtue assists students with choosing and applying for the right course of study, obtaining school admissions, visa processing, and booking travel as required.

A significant proportion of Virtue's clients are Nigerian students. Nigerian children are singled out for some special treatment when it comes to the granting of study permit ("SP") to come to Canada for legitimate reasons – further their education. It is irksome and frustrating for most people involved in the process, from the young prospective students, to their parents, and to authorized education and immigration agents such as Virtue. Virtue's experience is not unique as on various online Nigerian fora, the complains have been mounting, accentuated each year by further tightening of the noose. Meanwhile, Canadian authorities and institutions embark on elaborate roadshows and incurring expenses under the auspices of EduCanada Fair to solicit students from Nigeria in the cities of Abuja and Lagos annually. Sometimes you wonder if the fairs are designed to tick some boxes or to run some budgets as religion or just vacation to the warmer weather of Nigeria as the Fairs typically hold around the cold months of Canada. Otherwise, how do you justify such annual pilgrimage when you plan to reject almost all the same applicants you just pitched the glories of the Canadian educational to?

From our vantage point as agents to several Canadian schools who recruit from around the world, it is fair to say that the main misfortune of Nigerian children stems from their being born in Nigeria. These children, typically range in age from 15-20 years old, often are applying to come to Canada for high school and undergraduate studies. In every case, they will already have been accepted by accredited schools in Canada and their parents will have paid their tuition in full. **Nigerian students are routinely refused SP with bogus and unsubstantiated reasons. Samples of such reasons are stated below (with our rebuttals):**

"No travel history"

Study permits have been denied due to the children having insufficient travel history. How many kids of age 15-20 years old from other countries will have travelled out of their shores at such a young age? What counts as sufficient travel history? This remains unclear. This is a discriminatory



reason to exclude Nigerian students. It is elitist and serves no real purpose other than to exclude students from certain backgrounds. (It must be pointed out here that in case law, previous travel is not a mandatory but a discretionary reason for a refusal).

“Family ties in country of visit and country of residence”

It is absurd that the fact of a student having or not having a relative in Canada should be a critical determinant for SP issuance. The parents obviously want a better, quality, and uninterrupted education for their ward which necessitated the decision. Painfully, we have observed that the same ground is not universally and consistently applied to other regions of the world where we also source students from as education agents. From experience, our Nigerian students who have thrived and excelled in Canada very seldom have family members based in Canada. This ground for refusal is random and discriminatory.

“Based on your personal assets and financial status we do not think you will return to your country after your studies”

How does any unbiased and well-meaning person expect a kid of 16 years to have accumulated sufficient personal assets to justify a visa issuance? That’s why the children have their parents and sponsors provide backing documentation of ample financial support.

“Purpose of Visit”

It is unfathomable that children aged 15 and 16 years old, in high school and with valid offers from accredited Canadian schools, whose tuition have been fully paid for the entire year, would be refused study permit on the grounds of the so-called “purpose of visit.” What other reasons would outweigh a Letter of Acceptance from an accredited school especially where the sponsors are the parents, and tuition for a year has been paid in full? The purpose of visit is ambiguous and mostly a subterfuge.

An Example of an Unjustified Study Permit Refusal

We were involved in a case where a young 17-year-old boy, registered as a student with Carleton University, traveled to his home country, Nigeria, to spend his summer holiday with his family. Unfortunately, he was the victim of theft at the Lagos International Airport where he lost his international passport containing his issued Canadian temporary resident visa (“TRV”), and the US and UK multiple entry visas. He properly reported the theft to the Nigeria Police in addition to an affidavit and was subsequently issued a new passport by the Nigerian Immigration Service.

He approached the Canadian Deputy High Commission office in Lagos Nigeria for a replacement TRV to enable him return to school in Canada and was refused in August 17, 2017. He reapplied after meeting what he understood were the shortfalls on the first application and was again refused a replacement TRV on September 14, 2017. His parents thereafter engaged our services as duly certified and registered immigration and educational consultants to file a third application. On October 27, 2017 the request filed by us accompanied with a detailed submission letter, to



replace the applicant's TRV was again turned down. The refusal letter requested the victim to apply again if, among others, he could prove that he was a bona fide student. Carlton University wrote attesting to that fact that he is in good standing. Nevertheless, the application was again denied.

The refusal to replace the TRV for a student with a valid and current Study Permit expiring August 30, 2020 left this minor and his family confounded and devastated. They don't think the Canadian system stands for equity and justice anymore. We followed due process to complain to CIC's Case Review on November 23, 2017. We received a response from Case Review (CIC) on November 30 informing us that the decision of the Visa Officer was final. That boy is now stranded in Nigeria. **A child who completed his grade 12 education here in Canada, proceeded to the University and was already in his second year of study. It is conjecture but reasonable to assume that had the poor boy been born in the United States or Europe, and applied for his TRV from these western countries, he would be graduating with his Carleton mates here in Canada this year.**

Conclusion

There are many other war stories from our job as Canadian education and immigration consultants but perhaps, the foregoing will suffice for now. There are several instances of the absolute and discretionary use of powers to marginalize the interests and well-being of Nigerians. This may not be the forum to debate the removal of immigration (permanent residency) processing office from Nigeria (the largest black commonwealth country and Africa's largest economy) to Accra, Ghana, and recently, the removal of the SP and TRV processing privileges from Nigeria to Nairobi, Kenya. **It should be clear that Nigeria has been singled out for some special humiliation. We may not know the full reasons but we are of the opinion that Canada's interests are not best served by these tendencies.**