
Canadian Government not being transparent with U.S. State Department about Access to Information

Joint Letter to Secretary Clinton will correct the record

Vancouver, BC – Newspapers Canada and the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association have joined forces to correct the federal government’s claims about their performance on transparency and Access to Information made in a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The [joint letter to Clinton](#) updates and adds information missing from a [letter](#) sent by Foreign Minister John Baird to Clinton on September 19, 2011. Baird’s letter is an application to join an international group called the [Open Government Partnership](#), which is devoted to transparency and accountability.

“It is shameful to have to write to a foreign government about how badly our government has performed, but that performance is an even bigger shame,” said Newspapers Canada President John Hinds. “The true state of affairs really had to be revealed.”

The Foreign Minister’s letter boasts of Canada having had an Access to Information law for almost thirty years, but fails to mention that the *Act* is woefully out of date and that efforts to reform it have been resisted for many years.

Other points Minister Baird forgot to mention include:

- The Conservative government has failed to implement seven of its eight promises to improve access to information.
- The Conservative government has included a number of Crown Corporations and other bodies under the *Act*, but has since created multi-billion dollar organizations like P3 Canada which operate outside access to information laws.
- The government seems content with having ministers’ offices and the people who work in them outside the *Access to Information Act*.
- Parliamentary committees, successive Information Commissioners and an array of transparency experts have stated that the federal ATI system is broken and this country has fallen behind international standards for openness.

FIPA recommended to Secretary Clinton that Canada be helped and given guidance by taking part in the “New Country Guidance process”.

“We hope that some good may come of this,” said FIPA Executive Director Vincent Gogolek. “Perhaps international embarrassment will do what years of studies, reports and critiques have failed to do, which is to force the government to bring the ATI system into the 21st century.”

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