

Bloc and NDP ask Ottawa to justify destroying foreign passports

By Antoine Trépanier, Le Droit

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When the CBSA comes across a foreign passport, it must determine whether it should be sent to the embassy of the issuing country or to Immigration Canada. Passports are never destroyed without prior evaluation and consultation. (Jeff McIntosh/Canadian Press)

Bloc and NDP ask Ottawa to justify destroying foreign passports,

The Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party (NDP) are calling on the federal government to explain the destruction of foreign passports at the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Le Droit revealed on Wednesday that an employee of the agency's National Records Division destroyed numerous foreign passports, in 2015, while indicating in federal databases that they had been returned to the embassies of the issuing countries. The order she received from her superiors, according to our sources, was then to produce false documents, which is prohibited under the Criminal Code.

When the CBSA gets hold of a foreign passport, it has to decide whether to send it to the embassy of the issuing country or to Immigration Canada. Passports are never destroyed without prior evaluation and consultation.

Luc Sabourin, then a junior program officer in the CBSA's National Documents Division, revealed that he had been asked to destroy these passports. He refused. Another agent, Shannon Stinner, also testified to Le Droit that he had been questioned on the subject. He too said he refused to comply with the request.

As a junior program officer in the CBSA's National Documents Division, Luc Sabourin refused to destroy foreign passports. (Patrick Woodbury/Le Droit)

Mr. Sabourin then checked dozens of passports that were to be destroyed by a young employee and found that "two individuals had serious criminality on their files, with departure notices and deportation notices and also the mention 'Wanted'".

"If our allies discover this, it could cause embarrassment for the Canadian government," he maintains.

The Bloc Québécois was quick to ask the government to explain these revelations. The political party says it is "gathering the facts" and is strongly considering calling for an inquiry into the matter.

What worries me is that this is the tip of the iceberg," says Mirabel MP Jean-Denis Garon. These are very, very serious actions. What worries me is that they were tolerated and everything we don't know. We're waiting for the government to react.

Jean-Denis Garon, Bloc Québécois MP (Patrick Woodbury/Le Droit)

In a press scrum on Wednesday, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh also expressed his concern about the affair and wants the light to be shed.

"I think we need to investigate. What is the forum for this investigation? I remain open, but it's clear that we need answers," he said.

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

Ottawa walks on eggshells

The office of Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc declined to comment Wednesday. When we reported on the case of Luc Sabourin, the CBSA never responded to our questions about the destruction of these foreign passports.

Treasury Board President Anita Anand also declined to comment on Le Droit's revelations.

For its part, the Conservative Party of Canada has not reacted to Sabourin and Stinner's allegations about foreign passports.

In a written statement, Quebec lieutenant-politician Pierre Paul-Hus denounced the government's failure to further protect whistleblowers.

"We will continue to fight for adequate protection for these courageous individuals," he wrote.

Antoine Trépanier, Le Droit

Antoine Trépanier has been a parliamentary reporter in Ottawa since 2021. Previously, he was a reporter for Radio-Canada in Ottawa and Moncton. Antoine is co-author of "Ce que j'aurais voulu dire à mes enfants", the memoirs of former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Michel Bastarache.

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