



Re: Minister Collins' Comments about the Centre for Law and Democracy

In a News Release of 14 June 2012 (<http://newenergynl.ca/news-piece/20120613-1/>), the Honourable Felix Collins, Minister of Justice of Newfoundland, commented on a media report citing research by the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD). The research, the RTI Rating (http://www.law-democracy.org/?page_id=1003), involves an assessment of all national access to information laws, undertaken by CLD and another highly respected international human rights organisation, Access Info Europe. The methodology for the research involved an Advisory Council (http://www.law-democracy.org/?page_id=1117) of leading experts on access to information from around the world.

We applied the RTI Rating to the current Newfoundland access to information, and it scored a respectable 101 points out of a possible 150. The amendments contained in Bill 29, which was passed on Friday morning, will reduce the score to 93 points, a considerable drop.

Collins' statement claimed that "most countries that ranked the highest or strongest on this list are third world countries. Many of these countries are listed on travel alert watch lists, have known human rights abuses and high crime rates."

In fact, of the 20 countries that scored higher than the current Newfoundland law, three are members of the European Union, and rated as having "very high human development" in the 2011 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Another seven are rated as having high human development, six as having medium human development (the group in which one finds China, for example), and only four were of low human development.

In a speech to the House of Assembly on 14 June 2012, Collins used derogatory terms to refer to CLD, and claimed we had financial motives in publicising our research. CLD is no stranger to working in difficult political environments. Over the past year, we have conducted projects in Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Somalia and many other countries that are known for being particularly hostile to democratising forces. However, this is the first time that the integrity and professionalism of our organisation have ever been directly attacked by a political leader.

We stand by our research, which demonstrates that the Bill 29 substantially weakens the legal framework for access to information in Newfoundland.

Centre for Law and Democracy