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Blaney McMurtry
BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS LLP

Blaneys on Immigration

EDITOR:
Henry J. Chang
416.597.4883
hchang@blaney.com

This newsletter is designed to highlight new issues of importance in immigration related law. We hope you will find it interesting, and welcome your comments.

Feel free to contact any of the lawyers who wrote or are quoted in these articles for more information, or call the head of our Immigration Law Group, Ian Epstein at 416.593.3915 or iepstein@blaney.com.

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"[The] proposed Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act ... is intended to amend the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code for the purpose of preventing barbaric cultural practices from taking place in Canada."

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO PREVENT BARBARIC CULTURAL PRACTICES IN CANADA

Henry J. Chang

On November 5, 2014, Citizenship and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander announced that the Government of Canada had tabled its proposed *Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act* (the "Proposed Act"). The Proposed Act is intended to amend the current *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* ("IRPA"), the *Civil Marriage Act* and the *Criminal Code* for the purpose of preventing barbaric cultural practices from taking place in Canada.

According to the Government of Canada, the Proposed Act will provide more protection and support for vulnerable immigrants, primarily women and girls, including:

- Creating a new inadmissibility under IRPA that would render permanent residents and temporary residents inadmissible if they practice polygamy in Canada;
- Strengthening Canadian marriage laws by amending the *Civil Marriage Act* to codify the existing legal requirements, at the national level, for "free and enlightened consent" and establishing a new national minimum age for marriage of sixteen (16);
- Helping to protect potential victims of early or forced marriages by creating a new specific court-ordered peace bond to be used where there are grounds to fear that a person would commit a forced or early marriage offence, including the mandatory surrendering of a passport to prevent a child from being taken out of the country to facilitate a forced marriage;
- Criminalizing certain conduct related to early and forced marriage ceremonies in the *Criminal Code*, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such marriage;
- Limiting the defence of provocation so that it would not apply in alleged "honour" killings and many spousal homicides; and
- Including consequential amendments to the *Prisons and Reformatories Act* and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* to include the above court-ordered peace bond.

In terms of the immigration-related amendments, the Proposed Act will attempt to address the issue of polygamy through the creation of a new polygamy-specific ground of inadmissibility.

"[A]nnounced changes to Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program ("TFWP") ... to impose fines of up to $100,000 on employers who violated the TFWP."

Henry J. Chang is a partner in the firm's Immigration Law group. He is admitted to the practice of law in the Province of Ontario and the State of California. Henry is also an Executive Member of the Canadian Bar Association National Citizenship & Immigration Law Section. A recognized authority in the field of United States and Canadian immigration law, he lectures extensively on the subject in both the United States and Canada.

Henry may be reached directly at 416.597.4883 or hchang@blaney.com.

Under this new ground, foreign nationals (both temporary residents and permanent residents) who practice polygamy in Canada could be found inadmissible on that basis alone, without the need for a criminal conviction. If such a foreign national is found to be inadmissible under this ground, they could then be subject to removal from Canada.

While current IRPA provisions require foreign nationals wishing to become permanent residents to have only one spouse, once in Canada, it is difficult to find these individuals inadmissible. A criminal conviction or finding of misrepresentation is required before a person practicing polygamy in Canada can be found inadmissible.

Once the Proposed Act is implemented, a polygamist permanent resident or foreign national who is or will be physically present in Canada with even one of their polygamous spouses will be deemed to be practicing polygamy in Canada. The permanent resident or foreign national could be found inadmissible *on that basis alone*, without requiring evidence that the person misrepresented their situation or has a criminal conviction.

As mentioned above, the new ground of inadmissibility would apply to the temporary stream, to the permanent immigration stream, and to existing Canadian permanent residents:

- While in the permanent stream, permanent residents will be required to stop practicing polygamy and will only be permitted to immigrate with one monogamous spouse.
- In the temporary stream, visitors, students and workers who practice polygamy abroad and come to Canada with even one of their spouses, or who join one of their spouses in Canada, would be deemed to be practicing polygamy on Canadian soil and would be inadmissible under IRPA.
- Existing permanent residents who practice polygamy in Canada would also be inadmissible under IRPA. This should apply even where one of the polygamous spouses is residing outside Canada.

Although the stated objectives of the Proposed Act are admirable, some critics have alleged that the immigration-related amendments will instead ensure that vulnerable women and girls never have the opportunity to come to Canada, where they might otherwise benefit from the protection of Canadian laws. In other words, it will not necessarily eliminate barbaric cultural practices; it will only ensure that they do not take place on Canadian soil.

It remains to be seen what effect the proposed ground of inadmissibility will have on vulnerable women and girls who reside abroad. However, it should at least discourage Canadian permanent residents from continuing the practice of polygamy after their arrival in Canada. ■

ESDC CONSIDERS ADMINISTRATIVE MONETARY PENALTIES AND LONGER BANS ON EMPLOYERS WHO VIOLATE THE TFWP

Henry J. Chang

As was previously mentioned in the July 2014 issue of *Blaneys on Immigration*, on June 20, 2014, the Jason Kenney, Minister of Employment and Social Development, and Chris Alexander, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, announced changes to Canada's Temporary

"If an employer can demonstrate that their failure to comply was justified, they will not be sanctioned under the current system."

Foreign Worker Program ("TFWP"). Among these changes was a proposal to impose fines of up to $100,000 on employers who violated the TFWP. The names of employers who were fined, and the amount of the fine, would also be published on the Blacklist.

At the end of September 2014, Employment and Social Development Canada ("ESDC") published a discussion paper, which proposed to implement an Administrative Monetary Penalty ("AMP") system for violations of the TFWP; penalties of up to $100,000 could be imposed under this new system. It also proposed to increase the maximum ban for employers who violate the TFWP from two years to ten years (a permanent ban was also being considered).

Under the current regulations, non-compliance with the TFWP may be justified (i.e. excused) in certain circumstances. According to Subsection 203(1.1) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* ("IRPR"), the permitted justifications include:

- A change in federal or provincial law;
- A change to the provisions of a collective agreement;
- The implementation of measures by the employer in response to a dramatic change in economic conditions that directly affected the business of the employer, provided that the measures were not directed disproportionately at foreign nationals employed by the employer;
- An error in interpretation made in good faith by the employer with respect to its obligations to a foreign national, if the employer subsequently provided compensation — or if it was not possible to provide compensation, made sufficient efforts to do so — to all foreign nationals who suffered a disadvantage as a result of the error;
- An unintentional accounting or administrative error made by the employer, if the employer subsequently provided compensation — or if it was not possible to provide compensation, made sufficient efforts to do so — to all foreign nationals who suffered a disadvantage as a result of the error;
- Circumstances similar to those set out above; or
- *Force majeure* (i.e. fire, flood, etc.).

If an employer can demonstrate that their failure to comply was justified, they will not be sanctioned under the current system.

For some reason, ESDC is concerned that the current regulations do not allow a non-compliant (but justified) employer to be sanctioned if they take corrective action. For example, if non-compliance due to an unintentional accounting or administrative error resulted in the underpayment of a temporary foreign worker, the employer cannot be sanctioned if the unpaid wages are paid. Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing.

In response to this perceived loophole, ESDC is proposing to amend the IRPR so that consequences will be imposed on these non-compliant employers regardless of whether they take corrective action. Specifically, it wants non-compliance resulting from good faith errors and unintentional accounting or administrative errors to still be subject to sanctions such as an AMP, a ban, and/or the publication of the employer's

"While the proposal to increase maximum duration of the ban from two years to ten years is not unreasonable, the idea of imposing a financial penalty on employers who inadvertently become non-compliant due to a good faith error or an unintentional accounting or administrative error (caused by the employer) is questionable."

name. Of course, ESDC claims that the employer's response to the violation (for example, the repayment of wages) would be taken into account in determining the amount of the AMP or the length of the ban so that there is still an incentive for the employer to take corrective action.

EDSC also claims that it would not change the justifications related to *force majeure* and changes to federal or provincial laws, collective agreements, and economic conditions (i.e. where the temporary foreign worker's hours are reduced below what was stated in the job offer due to an economic downturn that reduced the hours of all workers). Sanctions such as AMPs or bans would not be imposed on non-compliant employers when one of these justifications applies.

ESDC's rationale for its proposal is that the existing provisions to ban a non-compliant employer for two years and to revoke its Labour Market Impact Assessments ("LMIAs") and work permits may be too severe in some circumstances and not severe enough in others. It also claims that these consequences do not ensure that an employer does not benefit financially from non-compliance.

While the proposal to increase the maximum duration of the ban from two years to ten years is not unreasonable, the idea of imposing a financial penalty on employers who inadvertently become non-compliant due to a good faith error or an unintentional accounting or administrative error (caused by the employer) is questionable. The existing justifications are in place because the current system is intended to be remedial and to punish only violators whose actions are not justified.

By imposing penalties for inadvertent non-compliance due to good faith errors or unintentional accounting/administrative errors, ESDC will essentially impose strict liability on employers. If the intention really is to do that, there is no reason to retain the other justifications described in R203(1.1) either. If strict liability applies, even violations due to reasons beyond the control of the employer (i.e. *force majeure*) should be penalized, although these reasons can be considered when determining the appropriate penalty.

Of course, the imposition of strict liability for employers would not necessarily ensure greater compliance with the TFWP but it would impose even greater burdens on employers who are making a good faith attempt to comply. In other words, this would be a very bad idea.

There is certainly merit in applying AMPs to violations that do not fall under R203(1.1). Even where the violation cannot be justified, an employer ban or the revocation of the employer's LMIAs and work permits may be too severe a penalty under some circumstances. In addition, the current sanctions may not be severe enough to punish the most outrageous violators.

In general, the proposal to implement an AMP system is a reasonable one. However, it makes no sense to penalize employers who have made a good faith attempt to comply with the regulations. If the existing justifications described in R203(1.1) are retained and AMPs are imposed only in cases of unjustified non-compliance, the objectives of the TFWP program will still be served but will not place an undue burden on employers who are doing their best to comply. ■

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Blaney McMurtry
BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS LLP

2 Queen St. East, Suite 1500
Toronto, Canada M5C 3G5
416.593.1221 TEL
416.593.5437 FAX
www.blaney.com

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