

NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

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Civil Rights Group Calls for a Halt to Government's Copyright Trade Negotiations

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association is calling for the federal government to come clean on its secret copyright trade negotiations. Recently leaked documents indicate that the government's "closed-door" negotiation of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) will usher in sweeping police and border agent searches and confiscations of citizens' electronic devices in the name of anti-piracy.

BCCLA President Rob Holmes questions what is going on: "Using government law enforcement agents at borders and other checkpoints for surveillance and collection of what in many instances would amount to notional civil debt claims by copyright holders lacks all sense of proportionality. It's using a sledgehammer to swat a fly and violates privacy, freedom of expression and due process rights."

The BCCLA is also concerned about ACTA requiring Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to give customer information to police without a warrant. In the fall of 2007, the Minister of Public Safety went on record promising that his government would not introduce legislation that would require ISPs to give customer information to the police. Protecting privacy is essential in a free society. That applies to private information that people put on their computers, as much as to private papers kept in a desk in your house. It appears the government may be about to agree to try to drive a large hole through the basic protections Canadians count on, including rights protected by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

BCCLA President Rob Holmes adds that: "We simply don't know what is being talked about under the guise of copyright treaty negotiations. But if the leaks are right, intrusive state powers aimed at protecting special interests but harming the general public are being considered. We hope that is wrong. These are issues that affect citizens' fundamental rights. Before he re-entered political life, as President of the National Citizens Coalition, the Prime Minister took a stand about protecting free speech, privacy rights and open and accountable government. He should hold to those principles now. Proposals such as these, if they are raised at all, should be brought forward and reviewed publicly and openly in Parliament before the government commits to them in an international forum, not after."

Today, the BCCLA sent a letter to the Prime Minister calling for the government to put a halt to its secret ACTA negotiation until the substance of the negotiations are made public and the process is made transparent and accountable.

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