



## Innocence Canada Endorses Leadership Choice

### For immediate release

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Toronto: The appointment of two prominent retired judges to help structure a wrongful convictions review body represents an important step forward on a historic project, Innocence Canada said today.

Innocence Canada co-presidents Ron Dalton and Kirk Makin applauded the appointment of Justices Harry Laforme and Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré to fulfill this important role, saying it ensures a sound set of recommendations for an independent review commission.

"As a renowned jurist with a broad knowledge of the law, Justice Laforme is an ideal choice," Mr. Makin said. "Being indigenous, he also brings keen insight into how the law is often prone to malfunction when it comes to defendants from marginalized groups."

"Justice Westmoreland-Traoré is an equally inspired choice. The first black judge in Quebec, her bilingual background and rich experience in academia and human rights are ideal credentials for the project she will now help lead." Mr. Makin said.

Justice Minister David Lametti announced the next step in the creation of the independent commission today, almost 18 months after his government said it intended to create such a body.

Advocates for the wrongly convicted have pushed for a properly-funded, independent commission for the past 25 years. A half-dozen inquiries into notorious miscarriages of justice have also strongly endorsed the idea.

Innocence Canada and a handful of university projects are currently the last hope for individuals convicted of serious crimes who continue to maintain their innocence. Working pro bono or historically under funded, these groups investigate claims of innocence and file detailed submissions in an attempt to persuade the Department of Justice to reopen these cases.

An independent commission - such as exist in a handful of jurisdictions including the United Kingdom - would have resources and police-like powers to investigate, search and compel witness testimony. It would afford a speedier route for defendants to obtain retrial or full exoneration.

"For more than a generation, the goal of creating an independent commission has been the Holy Grail of the innocence movement," Mr. Dalton said. "While we are concerned by how long it is taking to get this project going, we look forward to the prospect of all parties co-operating to create this vital institution."

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