



For Immediate Release

WHEN THE STATE OVERRIDES PARENTAL RIGHTS

Swedish homeschooling family forced into exile in Finland; news follows closely on the heels of a Montreal principal threatening to call youth protection services because a mother chose to home school and the Supreme Court of Canada's decision to deny Quebec parents the right to exempt their children from a controversial new course

March 1, 2012 (Ottawa) - Today the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada has learned that a Swedish homeschooling father and public advocate for homeschooling, Jonas Himmelstrand, has been forced into exile in Finland by Swedish authorities. Jonas Himmelstrand, founder of the Mireja Institute, a Swedish secular pro-family think-tank, [gave a very compelling presentation at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada's annual policy conference in May 2011](#). He and his family have been under attack for well over three years. However, the situation became unbearable in late 2011 with Swedish authorities indicating they would fine the Himmelstrands USD\$26,000 for homeschooling.

This news reaches Canadian soil just [as the CBC reported on February 28](#) that when a Montreal mother chose to remove her son from high school, enrolling him in an online learning course, the principal threatened to call social services.

More troubling still is a recent Supreme Court of Canada decision to overstep bounds in an education case in Quebec. They ruled on February 17, 2012 that Quebec parents do not have the right to remove their children from the controversial new Ethics and Religious Culture Program. This contradicts freedom of religion, because the course teaches material that is contrary to these parents' faith.

Canadian parents have not yet had to struggle in the same way as Swedish parents, with many Swedish homeschooling families leaving their country. Just the same, the recent Supreme Court ruling shows a remarkable hubris in denying parents the ability to educate their children as they see fit, particularly at young ages.

Sweden is commonly cited in North America by enthusiasts for national childcare as a success story to emulate. It is important to publicize the fact that some Swedish families are severely persecuted for their educational choices. Says Jonas Himmelstrand, "I'm sure they believed that if they just tell us it's illegal, we'll [give in]. But they did not understand at all — in any way — the power behind homeschooling parents. They miscalculated completely because they never tried to understand the reasons why we were doing it."

The same can be said for the Canadian judges at the Supreme Court in failing to recognize the right of Canadian parents to choose which classes their children can or cannot attend.

Further information about Jonas Himmelstrand's case can be read [here](#) and [here](#). For additional information please contact Andrea Mrozek, Manager of Research and Communications, at 613-565-3832, ext. 7502.

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