

Opinion / Editorials**Charities under audit fire band together for answers from Canada Revenue Agency:
Editorial**

The government should agree to meeting with charities to explain its targeting of high profile environmental, aid and free speech charities.



ADRIAN WYLD / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Revenue Minister Kerry-Lynne Findlay denies the rash of charity audits are politically motivated.

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It's right – and brave – that a dozen international aid charities are [joining forces to push back against the Canada Revenue Agency](#).

For two years now environmental, aid, human rights and free speech charities have felt they were targeted for newly funded CRA audits of their political activities because they had been outspoken critics of government policies.

At first they were fearful to speak out lest they draw the ire of the tax man, and lose their charitable status – and thus their ability to raise tax-free charitable donations.

But then the government upped the ante. It increased the number of charitable organizations selected for the onerous reviews, targeting 60, and increased the new budget for auditing political activities to \$13.4 million from \$8 million.

Since then a handful of well-respected charities – including PEN Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation, Tides Canada, the Pembina Foundation and KAIROS Canada – have stepped forward to protest audits that raise serious concerns about the potential of politically motivated harassment.

Now the international aid charities — backed by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, which represents 70 groups that funnel charity dollars abroad to alleviate poverty and defend human rights — are asking for a meeting with the CRA.

“The situation is negative and it’s very worrying,” says Julia Sanchez, executive director of the council.

The charities’ request couldn’t be more welcome as a step towards clearing the air on an issue that has the optics of the government using the CRA as an attack dog against organizations that advocate views it disagrees with.

Revenue Minister Kerry-Lynne Findlay denies the audits are politically motivated. She says the CRA is just doing its job by ensuring that charities are following the rules on political spending.

But the charities aren’t alone in their fears that the purpose of the audits is to put a chill on certain activities — from criticizing the oilsands to the government muzzling of scientists to Canada’s position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The opposition NDP says the audit program “has the appearance of blatantly abusing CRA resources to target those who do not agree with the government.” It’s calling for an independent review of the new CRA activities, and then a parliamentary probe, to determine whether they amount to a crack-down on human rights advocates, environmentalists and anti-poverty activists.

The government should agree to both of those requests, if only to dispel the concerns and uphold its contention that the tax agency is acting independently.

In the meantime, a meeting with charitable organizations is long overdue, considering the fears already inspired by the CRA’s audits.