

Speed up visa process for Haitians, PQ MNA urges

BENOÎT CHARETTE

Security concerns,
immigration
minister says

KEVIN DOUGHERTY
GAZETTE QUEBEC BUREAU

QUEBEC - Immigration Minister Yolande James insisted yesterday that Quebec is keeping its promise to make it easier for 3,000 Haitians, whose family members already live in the province, to leave their earthquake-shattered country.

"We are collaborating with the federal government," James told the National Assembly, after Benoit Charette,

Parti Québécois MNA for Deux-Montagnes, said the Canadian embassy in Port-au-Prince has only issued "a few visas."

James said the federal government has security concerns. Charette replied that children are being denied visas, blocking reunification with their parents.

"I do not think that children, now on the streets, constitute a threat to Canada and even less so, Quebec," Charette said.

Charette and Eline Occesite met reporters before question period. Occesite said she left Haiti in April 2009 and was granted refugee status in Canada because her life was in danger in Haiti.

She had to leave behind her two children, including a 14-year-old daughter. Since the

Jan. 12 earthquake, they have been living in tent cities erected as shelter.

Occesite said the danger to her children is real because one consequence of the earthquake is that convicts are roaming freely.

"My children are traumatized," she said.

In refusing her children visas, the embassy informed her in a letter, "they were not convinced the children would return to Haiti after their visit," she said.

Charette said James should press Ottawa to speed up the process, noting that the family members intend to remain in Quebec.

"There is a community network ready to welcome these people," he said.

kdougherty@
thegazette.canwest.com