SENIOR STAFFERS AXED FROM RIGHTS AGENCY

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Megan O'Toole, National Post, 3 March 2010
Three senior administrators at Rights and Democracy have been fired for alleged insubordination amid public infighting at the federally funded agency.

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Montreal lawyer Julius Grey confirmed the firings of Marie-France Cloutier, Razmik Panossian and Charles Vallerand, who were suspended without pay in January.

"It was some sort of claim of insubordination, which I think simply doesn't hold water," Mr. Grey said, noting he is preparing an action for unjust dismissal, seeking moral and punitive damages. He expects to launch the action within a week or two, citing a "complete absence of any justification" for the firings.
"Legally what's happened is just contrary to our employment laws in Quebec," Mr. Grey said.

Mr. Panossian was Rights and Democracy's policy director, while Mr. Vallerand handled communications and Ms. Cloutier was the administration and resources director.

The trio, along with the agency's entire staff, signed a letter in January calling for the resignation of board chairman Aurel Braun and members Jacques Gauthier and Elliot Tepper. The staff letter alleged former president Remy Beauregard was the victim of vindictive harassment from board members.

Mr. Gauthier took over the reins of the organization, which receives $11-million annually from the federal government, after Mr. Beauregard died of a heart attack hours after a particularly heated meeting dealing with the board's funding of certain groups critical of Israel.

Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon wants to appoint former Quebec Liberal cabinet member -- and more recently Canadian Alliance Party candidate -- Gerard Latulippe as the new president of Rights and Democracy, but the choice has been rejected by all opposition party leaders.

The Conservative government appointed Mr. Beauregard to a five-year term as Rights and Democracy president in June 2008.

As president, he sat on the board, and his run-ins with other directors escalated over the past year. Following his death, his widow, Suzanne Trepanier, said she had been told by a coroner that her husband's heart attack was likely linked to the stress he was under.

Rights and Democracy works in 15 developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas. Created in 1988, it receives almost all its $11-million annual budget from Ottawa.