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Sue the government, Masse advises Coates

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The Daily News

OTTAWA — Defence Minister Marcel Masse offered his advice yesterday to Keitha Coates, the woman who left the Armed Forces last week after being accused of lesbianism.

See us.
"If she feels that the government has not applied legislation or the bill of rights, she should go to court and ask the court to decide between what she thinks and what the government thinks," Masse said yesterday. "That's the way it is in Canada."

Coates, a 26-year-old leading seaman, left the Forces last week because her once-promising career had been stalled by a finding that she is homosexual, which she denies.

After a string of promotions and commendations over her five-year military career, she received notice last October while stationed in Shelburne that she would rise no higher in the Forces because of an allegation of homosexuality.

Before she quit, she began a grievance against the Canadian military, arguing it had conducted no investigation of the allegation, which she said was levelled by the U.S. navy while she was stationed in Washington state.

Masse said the courts are the normal avenue for such disputes.

Career frozen

The Justice Department has already warned the top military command that its policy on homosexuality would not stand a challenge under the Charter of Rights.

Current policy states the Armed Forces will not knowingly hire homosexuals, and, if discovered, their career is frozen.

Cabinet was reported ready last year to change this policy, but the Progressive Conservative caucus balked after the news was leaked in Washington.

Nothing has changed, it's discussed in caucus, and as long as we don't have a large consensus I think it's worth for some people who have some concern on this question to have the right



MARCEL MASSE

To express it," Masse said

The Department of National Defence is refusing comment, its information department accepts only written questions on homosexuality.

'Security reasons'

The *Daily News* wrote 13 questions to DND on the subject of homosexuals in the Forces, and three days later received a general reply to three questions.

DND said the special investigations unit that formerly checked suspected homosexual members for "security reasons" no longer investigates alleged homosexuals. "When investigations are required, they are normally conducted by the member's unit," DND writes.

But Coates' documents clearly show the initiative to have her declared homosexual came from headquarters. Her documents indicate her commanding officer at CFS Shelburne, Lt.-Cmdr. Philip Kenny, and an unnamed officer at Maritime Headquarters in Halifax, wrote to Ottawa on her behalf.

The *Daily News* asked whether a Canadian Forces member can be found to be homosexual solely on the basis of a U.S. navy investigation, but DND would only say the "request relates to personal information."