

Bureaucratic delays keep children from their mother

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When Evelyn Encila became a permanent resident of Canada on Jan. 20, she thought her five-year battle to stay in Canada and her efforts to bring her children here were over.

She decorated their rooms. She spent \$3,000 on their airline tickets.

But two and a half weeks later, Encila's children are still in the Philippines, waiting for visas.

"I don't know how much more stress

I can take," said the former nanny who has not seen her children since she began working abroad in 1985.

In 1996, Encila had been ordered deported after immigration officials in Manila ruled that her eldest daughter, Maria Victoria, was mentally retarded and ineligible to come to Canada. But in Oct. 1996, after Encila's lawyer challenged that finding in court, a federal justice ordered that Citizenship and Immigration stop its deportation action, re-open Encila's file, and allow her to sponsor her three younger children to come to this country.

On Friday, Encila's lawyer was back in Federal Court.

Shirish Chotalia is asking the court to order the Manila immigration office to issue visas to Encila's children immediately—or be held in contempt. "I'm absolutely furious," says Chotalia.

She says the visa office in Manila should have issued the Encila children their visas by Jan. 25. Her own attempts to call and fax the Manila visa post have gone unanswered.

"They don't respond. They don't care."

Chotalia wonders if Encila's high-profile battle with Immigration is behind the delay.

"Maybe it's malice. I don't know."

Randy Gurlock, assistant manager of the Edmonton Citizenship and Immigration office, says his own messages to the Manila office have also gone unanswered.

"I know that we will be following up with them. We expect them to issue the visas, that's all I can say.

Gurlock says there is no legal reason for the delay in issuing the visas.

"I can't believe that it's an act of mal-

ice. They deal with thousands and thousands of cases, and they process them as quickly as they can."

But Paul Kohl, of the Alberta Association for Community Living, whose advocacy group for the mentally disabled has supported Encila's court battles, says the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration should investigate the way the Manila office is being run.

"It's beyond my comprehension: This is five minute's work in a bureaucrat's day ... There are no excuses, as far as we can see ... just a real mean spirit."