

For immediate release

## **THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS OF ONTARIO AND IRIS THE VISUAL GROUP AGREE TO END LEGAL AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS**

**TORONTO (May 26, 2008)** – Today, the College of Optometrists of Ontario and IRIS The Visual Group announced they have agreed to withdraw their respective legal and disciplinary actions against one another over issues related to alleged professional misconduct and unfair restrictions on rights to freedom of association and expression. In coming to this agreement, both parties acknowledge little would be gained by further litigation, and efforts should be focused on developing new appropriate regulations.

The College first filed disciplinary and court proceedings against IRIS in July 2007 over concerns that the company's business practices violated College regulations as they relate to signage, advertising and alliances with non-optometrists. In response, IRIS, which actively uses trade names across Canada and encourages an open model of collaboration between optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists, filed a legal challenge against the College under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms over issues of freedom of expression and association.

“The College recognizes the need to update certain regulations, as many of them were made at a time when the eye care industry was vastly different than what it is today,” said Dr. Murray Turnour, Registrar of the College. “The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is currently considering amendments proposed by the College to some of the provisions that were the subject of the various legal actions. We see no reason to invest resources litigating regulations that we want changed. The College intends to ensure that the Charter rights of optometrists are respected while providing for appropriate public protection.”

“We are pleased to see this litigation come to an end, as we stand to win much more by working collaboratively” said Dr. Francis Jean, president and CEO of IRIS The Visual Group. “In our view, the current proposed amendments, while a step in the right direction, still contravene the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and are in need of further revision. IRIS aims to re-focus our efforts towards modernizing the current regulations so optometrists in Ontario can practice in a competitive marketplace, all while continuing to deliver the highest standard of patient care.”

The College agreed to ask a panel of the Discipline Committee to dismiss allegations of professional misconduct against four IRIS doctors and to withdraw a court action that it had initiated against Iris. IRIS agreed to withdraw its legal challenge to certain regulations under the Optometry Act that the College was attempting to enforce.

### **About the College of Optometrists of Ontario**

The College registers and governs optometrists practicing in Ontario. It has legislated responsibility to administer the Optometry Act and the Regulated Health Professions Act as it relates to the practice of optometry.

### **About Iris the Visual Group**

From its early beginnings in 1986 as a small optometric practice in Baie-Comeau on Quebec's remote North Shore, Iris The Visual Group has become Canada's largest eye care provider with a network of more than 500 opticians, optometrists, and ophthalmologists working together to provide the highest quality products and professional services within the eye care industry. A privately-owned corporation with more than 150 eye care centres across Canada, Iris offers options for optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists to become partners, owners, and franchisees within its network. For more information, please visit [www.iris.ca](http://www.iris.ca).

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