

QCGN to Air Canada: Apology Alone Cannot Undo Damage to English-speaking Quebec

MONTREAL, November 4, 2021 – No apology can undo the lasting damage that the CEO of Air Canada has inflicted on Quebec’s English-speaking community and the core national value of linguistic duality.

“Air Canada employs many Francophones and is obliged to communicate with the public in both official languages,” says Marlene Jennings, President of the Quebec Community Groups Network. “However, the attitude this week displayed by CEO Micheal Rousseau toward the French language was breathtakingly insensitive and arrogant.”

“Mr. Rousseau’s narrow-minded comment that he does not feel the need to learn French feeds the myth that English-speaking Quebecers are a privileged minority indifferent to French. His attitude simply does not reflect the values of our community,” Jennings said, noting that his tone-deaf comments provide ammunition to language hard-liners at a time when language strife is being brought to the forefront.

“We are baffled that Air Canada – which is subject to the Official Languages Act – is led by an individual incapable of communicating in both of Canada’s official languages,” Jennings adds. “While we acknowledge Mr. Rousseau’s carefully worded apology, we call on Air Canada’s Board of Directors to ensure that its full management team understands and embraces our national value of linguistic duality. Saying I’m sorry while issuing a promise to learn French is simply not enough.”

“Such an apology might have been sufficient as a remedial action 10, 20, or 30 years ago. But in 2021, an apology without a concrete plan of action along with a clear timeline to get there is no longer enough to meet the demands and requirements of Canada’s official language minority communities,” Jennings says.

“Moving forward, Air Canada has to do more than just pay lip service to its obligations – legal and moral – to Canada’s official languages. Air Canada must ensure its leadership is functionally bilingual and that it takes concrete and effective measures to raise awareness among senior managers and all of its employees, so they understand and rectify the company’s longstanding pattern of lapses in providing French-language services. And the example has to come straight from the top.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations across Quebec. As a centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action it identifies, explores, and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec and encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions, and leaders.

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